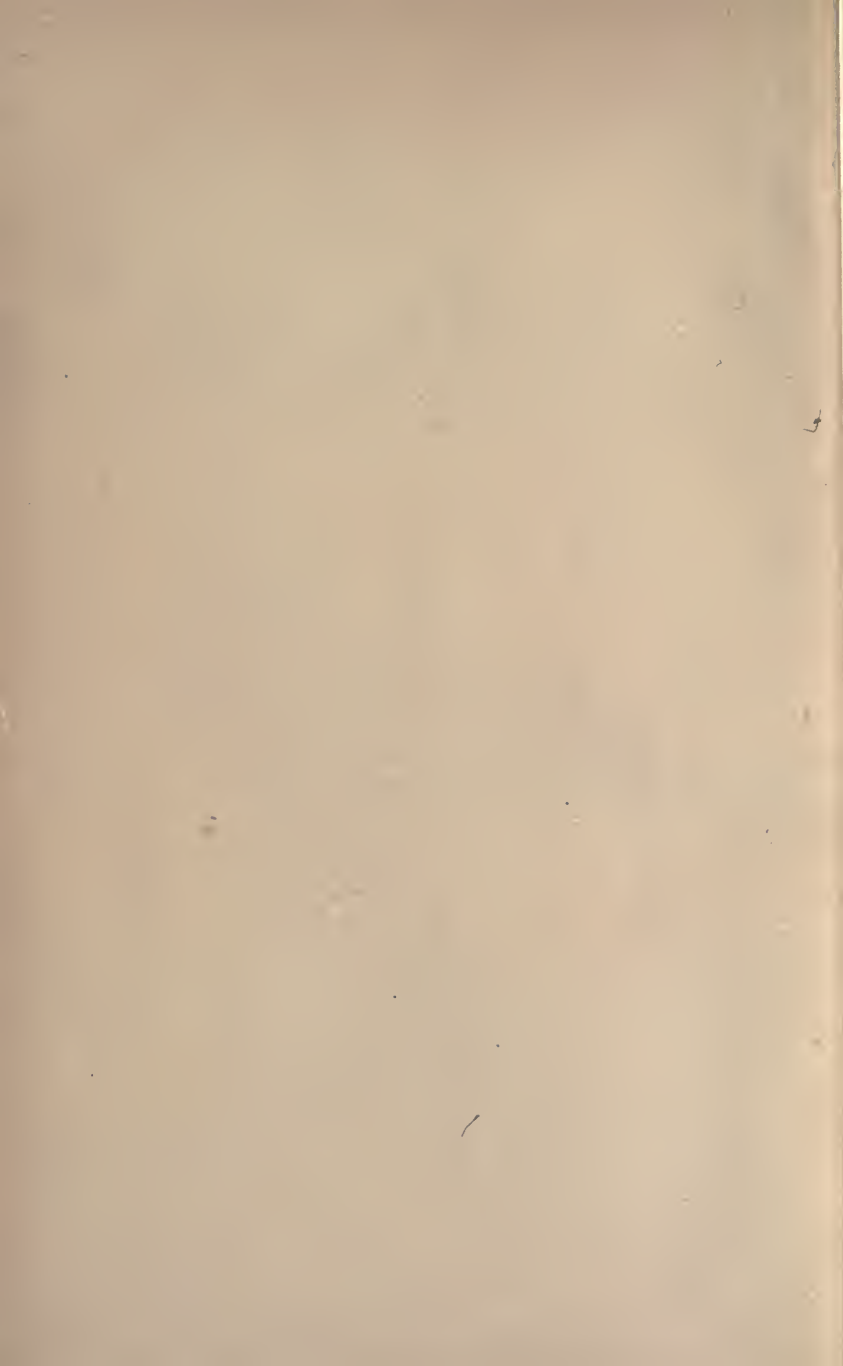






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THE  
LIFE OF HENRIK IBSEN.



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THE

# LIFE OF HENRIK IBSEN.

BY

HENRIK <sup>Bernhard</sup>JÆGER.

TRANSLATED BY CLARA BELL.

WITH THE VERSE DONE INTO ENGLISH FROM THE NORWEGIAN

ORIGINAL BY

EDMUND GOSSE.



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TO

*MADAME SUSANNAH IBSEN*

(née THORESEN),

FROM THE AUTHOR.





## PREFACE.

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THE Life of the famous Norwegian poet which is here presented to the English public was issued in Copenhagen, on his sixtieth birthday, March 20, 1888, under the title—*Henrik Ibsen : 1828–1888. Et literært Livsbillede*. It is the only existing biography of Henrik Ibsen which has any pretension to being authoritative, and it has the advantage of not merely being published with the poet's sanction, but of being enriched by a great number of notes and documents supplied by Ibsen himself.

The numerous poetical quotations from Ibsen's lyrical writings have been specially translated by Mr. Gosse for this edition, with scrupulous attention to the form and substance alike of the original,

and in almost every instance they may be taken as reproducing the exact external appearance of the passages they imitate.

An Index and a few notes have been added for the convenience of the English reader.

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# THE LIFE OF HENRIK IBSEN.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *CHILDHOOD—EARLY POETICAL EFFORTS.*

IN 1720 or thereabouts a Danish ship's-captain named Peter Ibsen came from Möen to Bergen, where he was admitted to the freedom of the city, and married the daughter of a German who had settled there. He was the great-great-grandfather of Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen's grandfather, who was also a captain, was Henrik Petersen Ibsen. He married Wenche Dischington, the daughter of a naturalised Scotsman, and died within a year of his marriage. His widow subsequently married Provost Von der Lippe at Solum, near Skien, and this tied her branch of the Ibsen family to that town. She had one son by her first marriage, who was born after his father's death, and named after him.

Henrik Ibsen the second married the daughter of one Plesner, a merchant at Skien. Plesner and his wife were both of German descent. But this union,

too, was but brief. Henrik Ibsen had chosen to follow the calling of his father and grandfather, and the vessel of which he was both owner and captain was lost with all hands on Hesnaes, near Grimstad; the very spot where the scene of *Terje Viken* is laid.

Only some fragments of the wreck with the name of the ship drifted to land to tell the tale of woe. A year later the widow married a seaman named Ole Paus, by whom she had five children. Her son by her first marriage was named Knud (or Canute), and became the father of the poet.

His mother's name was Maria Cornelia Altenburg; she was the daughter of a wealthy merchant of Skien, who, as was customary in those days, had begun life as a ship's-captain. He too was of German descent.

In each of these four generations the Danish seaman's blood had mingled with a foreign strain, German, Scotch, German, and again German. Even in these perhaps some infusion of Norwegian elements might be discovered, if the pedigrees of the mothers were investigated; but not a drop of Norwegian blood had, by direct descent, any part in the composition of Henrik Ibsen's temperament, which nevertheless has been styled "peculiarly Norwegian."

This ancestry throws light on his nature; it helps to explain his isolation and his cosmopolitan spirit; it accounts for his being able to detach himself so

completely from his native land, and spend more than twenty years in voluntary exile.

It also suggests the source of certain deeper-lying characteristics. The puritanism and idealism of the Scotch, which have played so important a part in the history of their country and set their mark on its philosophy, irresistibly recur to our minds when we study the man whose demands on Man are as inexorable as only those of an idealist can be, while his view of life is as gloomy as that of any puritan. The German element—German proclivity to speculative fancies—German delight in pure abstractions, and instinctive preference for strictly logical and systematic thought—are these not to be seen in Henrik Ibsen's individuality, and have they not had their influence on the development of the faculties of his soul?

And if we inquire yet further from whom he derived his intellectual peculiarities, we find that we must refer them to women, whose influence has evidently been preponderant. His grandmother must have been a highly-educated woman, by the standard of her day. She took an eager interest in all the movements of her time. Her character was stern and grave, and she seems to have been sincerely pious, which then, in the circle she moved in, was by no means common. It is recorded by the children of her second marriage that, with rare exceptions, she was conspicuous for a reserve and taciturnity which made it difficult to approach her.

His mother's, too, was one of those reserved natures which find it hard to be communicative. This reticence in later years developed into shyness, which all her children inherited in a greater or less degree. Ibsen's sister describes her, in a letter to the Norwegian author of this book in the following terms:<sup>1</sup>—"She was a silent, amiable woman, the soul of the house as regarded both her husband and her children. She always sacrificed herself. Bitterness and fault-finding were unknown to her."

The temperament of the men of the family was of a brighter hue. The grandfather seems to have been a clear-headed man, with many eager interests. He had a pleasant humour, and we are told that he was always devising sports and pastimes. The poet's father had inherited both his mother's severity and his father's liveliness. They combined in him in a keen wit. He was by nature pleasure-loving and sociable, with a fine understanding and ever-ready wit, which made him loved, though also feared, by his family and neighbours, for his jests were not always of the gentlest; he could be very biting and unsparing in his utterances about those who had in any way aroused his displeasure. It was evidently from him that the son inherited the germ of the peculiar talent which led him to write

<sup>1</sup> This shyness would seem to have come into the family from the Paus connection. Old Mrs. Altenburg, Ibsen's maternal grandmother, was sister of Ole Paus, his paternal grandmother's second husband; and the children of that marriage were equally reserved.



*Kærlighedens Komædie* (The Comedy of Love) and *De Unges Forbund* (The Young Men's League).

Under these conditions of ancestral tendencies, Henrik Ibsen was born at Skien, on the 20th of March 1828, the eldest child of his parents.

Skien was then, as it is still, a homely little town of wooden houses, containing scarcely 3000 inhabitants. But small as it was, it was the scene of much busy life and a not unimportant centre of trade; and Knud Ibsen, conducting an extensive and varied business, lived in the heart of the town.

Referring to his earliest impressions, Ibsen has written the following notes and has placed them at the author's disposal:—

“When the streets of my native town of Skien were named—or perhaps only re-named—some years since, the authorities did me the honour of calling one after me. So at least I learned from the newspapers, and I have heard it since from travellers. By their description this street leads from the market-place down to the Muddring<sup>1</sup> or harbour. But if this information is correct, I do not know why that street was chosen to bear my name, for neither was I born there nor did I ever live there.

“I was, indeed, born in a house on the market-place, ‘Stockmanns Gaard,’ as it was then called. It stood exactly opposite the front of the church, with its high flight of steps and conspicuous tower.

<sup>1</sup> Probably derived from *mudre*, to dredge—the harbour being dredged on shallow shores.

To the right of the church stood the town pillory, and to the left the town-hall, with the prison and the lock-up for mad persons. The fourth side of the market-square was occupied by the High School and the Lower School. The church stood apart in the middle.

“This then was the first view of the world on which my eyes rested. All buildings—nothing green, no open country landscape. But in this quadrangle of stone and wood the air was filled all day with the noise of two cascades, the Langefos and the Klosterfos, and the sound of many waters; and above the roar of all these cataracts came a piercing voice, like the screaming, weeping, and sighing of a wailing woman. This proceeded from hundreds of sawmills, which were worked by the falls. When, at a later day, I read of the guillotine, I could not help thinking of these sawmills.

“The church was beyond question the finest building in the town. When, at the end of the last century, the whole place was burnt down on Christmas Eve, through the carelessness of a maid-servant, the old church too was destroyed. The girl, of course, was executed. But the town, which was rebuilt with straight wide streets down the hollows and up the slopes to which they clung, gained on the occasion a new church, which the inhabitants declared, with commendable pride, should be built of yellow Dutch brick, and designed by an architect from Copenhagen, exactly like the church

at Kongsberg.<sup>1</sup> I did not at that time duly value this distinction, but what always attracted my attention was a burly, clumsy, white angel, which, on week days, floated in the air under the arched roof with a bowl in its hand, but on Sundays, when there was a child to be christened, softly descended earthwards.

“Even more perhaps than the white angel in the church, the black poodle of the tower engaged my fancy. From the tower the watchman used to proclaim the hour at night. This poodle had fiery red eyes, but he was rarely visible. Indeed, so far as I know, he was never seen but once. It was one New Year’s morning, at the very moment when the watchman shouted ‘One’ through the opening in the front of the tower. The black poodle came up the turret-stair behind him, stood still, and did no more than look at him with his fiery eyes; but the watchman fell out of the tower window down into the market-place, where the devout, who had gone to usher in the New Year’s morning by listening to a sermon, saw him lying dead. From that night the watchman never calls ‘One’ from the church tower at Skien. This incident of the watchman and the poodle had happened long before my time, and I have since heard that similar events had been known of old in many Norwegian churches.

<sup>1</sup> Kongsberg, a town a few miles southward of Christiania, has a large stone church of the eighteenth century. The church at Skien was restored in 1777.

“But that particular opening in the tower was noteworthy to me while I was yet but a child, from my having there received the first conscious and permanent impression on my mind. My nurse one day took me up the tower and allowed me to sit on the ledge outside, holding me firmly from behind, of course, in her faithful arms. I perfectly recollect how amazed I was at looking down on the tops of the hats of the people below. I looked into our own rooms, seeing the window-frames and curtains, and my mother sitting at one of the windows; indeed, I could see over the roof into the yard, where our brown horse stood hitched up to the stable-door and whisking his tail. A bright tin pail was hanging against the door. Then suddenly there was a great hurry and bustle and signalling from our house, and the nurse hastily snatched me in and hastened down with me. I remember nothing more; but I was often told afterwards that my mother had caught sight of me up in the tower-window, and, with a loud shriek, had fainted away, as people used to do in those days; and that when presently I was taken back to her, she cried, and kissed and fondled me. As a boy, I never went across the market-square without looking up at the tower-window. I always felt as though the opening and the church-puddle, were some special concern of mine.

“I have only one single recollection more of those early years of my life. Among other gifts from my godfathers, I had a large silver coin, on which a

man's head was stamped. The man had a high forehead, a large aquiline nose, and a projecting under-lip; his throat was bare, which always struck me as very strange. My nurse told me that the man on the coin was 'King Frederick Rex.' One day I took it into my head to play with this coin on the floor, with the disastrous result that it slipped into a crack. My parents, I believe, thought this an omen of evil, as the coin had been a christening-gift. The planks were taken up; but, in spite of much careful seeking and groping, 'King Frederick Rex' never came to light again. It was a long time before I ceased to regard myself as a great criminal, and whenever I saw the town constable, Peter Tysker, come out of the town-hall towards our house, I ran off as fast as I could into the nursery and hid under the bed.

"We did not live long in the house on the market-place. My father bought a larger house, into which we moved when I was about four years old. This new home was a corner house, a little higher up the town, at the foot of the Hundervad Bakke,<sup>1</sup> so named after an old doctor who spoke German; his dignified wife used to ride out in what was then called a glass coach, which in winter was used as a sleigh. There were a great many large rooms in our house, below and above, and here my parents led a very social life. But we boys lived but little within doors. The market-square, where the two public schools were, was the natural meeting-place and playground

<sup>1</sup> *Bakke* means hill.

for all the lads of the town. The High School was then under the direction of Rector Örn, a very distinguished and amiable old man; the head-master of the Lower School was Iver Flasarud, the beadle, a fine old man too, who was at the same time in great request as haircutter and barber. Many a fierce battle was fought by the boys of these two schools under the walls of the church; but I, as belonging to neither, was generally a looker-on. Besides, I was not pugnacious in my childhood.

“I found a far greater attraction in the pillory of which I have spoken, and in the town-hall, with all its mysterious and sinister appliances. The pillory was a post, painted reddish-brown, and about the height of a man’s stature. There was a large round knob at the top, which had been black. At the time I speak of, it looked like a benevolent and inviting face somewhat askew. In front of the post hung an iron chain to which an open hoop was attached; the two halves of this hoop always looked to me like two arms which were ready and eager to clutch me by the throat. The pillory had not, however, been used for many years, but I remember it perfectly, still standing at the time when I lived at Skien. Whether it still exists I do not know.

“And then there was the town-hall. Like the church, it had a high flight of steps. Under it were the prison-cells with barred windows looking out on the market-place. Behind those bars I have seen many pale and gloomy faces. One room, quite



underneath, in the cellars, was called the madman's cell; and incredible as it now seems to me, it was actually used, I believe, at that time to confine mad people in. That room, like the others, had barred windows, but inside the bars the whole of the small opening was filled in with a strong iron plate, pierced with small round holes and looking like a collander. It was related of this den that it had been the prison of a certain well-known criminal, named Brendeis, who had been branded; and I believe, too, that an escaped serf, who was afterwards recaptured, had been shut up there, and then flogged on the Mountain Market (Li-torvet). I remember hearing of this poor wretch from eye-witnesses, that when he was led to the place of punishment he went dancing, but that he had to be taken back to prison in a cart.

"Skien, in my young days, was an exceedingly lively and sociable town, quite unlike what it subsequently became. Several highly cultivated and wealthy families of consequence lived in the town itself or on their estates in the neighbourhood. Most of these families were more or less closely related, and dances, dinners, and music-parties followed each other, winter and summer, in almost unbroken succession. Many travellers also passed through the town, and as there were as yet no regular inns, they lodged with friends or connections. We almost always had guests in our large roomy house, especially at Christmas and Fair-time,

when the house was full, and we kept an open table from morning till night. The Fair at Skien was held in February, and it was a very happy time for us boys; we began to save up our money six months beforehand, to be able to see the jugglers, and rope-dancers, and horse-riders, and to buy ginger-bread down in the booths. Whether this Fair was an important one from a commercial point of view I know not; it survives in my memory only as a great popular holiday which lasted for about a week.

"The 17th of May<sup>1</sup> was not at that time kept with any special festivities at Skien. A few young people would go out to shoot at a mark with pop-guns on the Bleaching Hill (Blegebakken), or to burn 'witches;'<sup>2</sup> but that was about all. I suspect that this reserve on the part of our usually jovial town arose chiefly from its respect for the feelings of a man whom we all held in great awe, whose ancestral home lay close to Skien, and whom, for many reasons, no one cared to offend.

"But St. John's Eve made up for it. There were no public observances, but the boys and young men assembled in five or six or more parties, each concerned in collecting fuel for its own bonfire. So early as Whitsuntide we would begin to haunt the shipyards and stores to beg tar-barrels. A peculiar custom had existed from time immemorial. Any-

<sup>1</sup> This day, now universally kept as a holiday, is the anniversary of the ratification of the Norwegian Constitution.

<sup>2</sup> A sort of squib made of straw and gunpowder.



thing we could not get by fair means we stole, without either the owner or the police ever thinking of proceeding against the felony. Thus by degrees each set had collected a whole heap of empty tar-barrels. We enjoyed the same recognised right over old stranded boat-hulks. If we were so lucky as to succeed in dragging one away and hiding our booty, we had won the right of possession, or at any rate no one disputed it. Then on St. John's Eve the hulk was carried in triumph through the streets to the place where our bonfire was stacked. In it a fiddler was perched. I have often seen such a procession, and once took part in one."

What Ibsen relates in this passage is enough to give us an idea of what the influences of his childhood must have been: gloom and melancholy had the larger share. The solemnity of the church, the horrors of the prison, the threat of the pillory, the terrors of the madhouse, combined to make an impression which might well cast a shadow over his youthful light-heartedness and infuse a precocious gravity, even though the festivities of Fair-time and Midsummer Eve were their antidote.

The good people of Skien have from time immemorial enjoyed a reputation for piety. The religious tendencies which lead to sectarianism have long flourished there on a grateful soil. Early in the last century the town was known as a hotbed of pietism, and in Ibsen's youth, Lammers, the

famous preacher, laboured there, and started the movement which has since become known by his name.

From Skien, as its focus, it spread over the country, introducing a ferment into spiritual circles. The movement was naturally strongest in Skien itself, and Ibsen came into the closest contact with it, since several of his nearest relations caught the afflatus. Recollections and revivals of that time of religious excitement supplied some portion of the materials for *Brand*.

Another work of Ibsen's, *De Unges Forbund* (The Young Men's League), has also, and not without reason, been supposed to have had its origin in his reminiscences of his native town.

Skien had its "aristocracy" of officials and the wealthy old families of the town and neighbourhood; the rest were "plebeians." Between these castes there was as insurmountable a barrier as between the noble and citizen classes of a small German town in former ages. No degree of wealth or energy would qualify a man to pass it; every one who rose from the ranks was regarded as a *parvenu* like the landowner Monsen in the "Young Men's League," however firmly his position was established; but, on the other hand, it was easy enough to be excluded from the select circle, if the state of his fortunes should no longer justify any one in figuring in it.

The Ibsen household belonged to the "aristo-

crazy," both by position and connection, and in Ibsen's earliest years was a centre of the social life of the town. Ibsen was a man who, by his wit and by other social gifts, gathered people about him, and besides this he was a free-handed host, who loved to keep open house on a large and very liberal scale.

But when Henrik Ibsen was eight years old this easy-going life came to a sudden close. His father became insolvent; and the only possession left to the family when his various creditors were satisfied was a small, neglected, and decayed estate, Venstøb, not far from the town. Here they took refuge from misfortune, and the life they led there was one of poverty and retirement, in strong contrast to their former brilliant position. If the family had not before been aware of the wide social gulf which existed in the little town, they now, in the day of disaster, were made to feel it keenly. Their new status had no doubt cast a dark shadow over the little household, and next to the parents, Henrik Ibsen, as the eldest son, felt it most. He suddenly found himself an outcast, and at an early age had gone through the experience to which he gave expression in one of his earliest poems, written in 1850:—

Either an invited guest  
To life's feast thou enterest,  
Or as a beholder only,  
While along the street thou farest,  
Shivering in the wind and lonely,  
Through the blazing window starest.

It is quite certain that while still very young he attracted observation by his singular gravity. He did not play like other children. When his four younger brothers and sisters were romping together out of doors, he would withdraw into a little room by the kitchen-entrance, and bolt himself in to protect himself against the heedless incursions of the others. Here he would sit, not merely in the summer, but in the winter, through the severest cold. "He was never a pleasant companion to us," his sister writes in the letter before quoted, "and we always did our utmost to disturb him by throwing stones or snowballs at the wall or the door. We wanted him to play with us, and when he could no longer endure our teasing, he would rush out and drive us away. However, he was unskilled in all athletic exercises, and violence was not in him; nothing ever came of it. When he had chased us far enough, he went back into his room again."

What did he do there? Chiefly he sat absorbed in sundry old volumes, of which he had obtained possession. In that little room he acquired that familiarity with old books of which Hedvig speaks in the third act of *Vildanden* (The Wild Duck), and the words he puts into her mouth may very well be a reminiscence of his own childhood.

"And do you read those books?" Gregers asks.

"Oh, yes; all those I can. But most of them are in English, and I do not know English. Still I can look at the prints. Here is a heavy, big

book called 'Harryson's History of London.' It must be quite a hundred years old, and it is full of pictures. The frontispiece is Death, with an hour-glass, and a young lady.. I think that dreadful; but there are a great many more, of churches, and castles, and streets, and large ships sailing on the sea."

And when he was not busy with his books he studied magic! "Often on a Sunday evening he obtained leave to perform as a conjuror in one of the sitting-rooms" (the letter goes on to say), "and the neighbours were invited to be spectators. I can see him now in his round jacket, standing behind a huge chest, which was brought in and dusted for the occasion; and he would work wonders which to the amazed beholders appeared quite magical. No one, of course, knew that Henrik's younger brother sat in the chest, having been well paid beforehand for doing so. Otherwise he threatened to make a noise, and this was the most horrible thing that could happen from Henrik's point of view, so he always promised everything the boy asked for."

He also worked diligently with pencil and brush. He painted a great number of figures on cardboard in gaudy costumes, and afterwards cut them out and fixed them to little blocks of wood so that they would stand. He then composed them into various groups, some as if in conversation, others in attitudes to convey the idea that some important event

was going forward. These were the first indications of stage-craft in the future dramatist.

The only out-of-doors amusement that he cared for was building. To this he sometimes devoted himself. "I remember," his sister writes, "among other things a fortress, to my childish apprehension quite a work of art, which cost him and his younger brother long and severe labour. But the fortress was not to stand long; when it was finished, he took it by storm, and levelled it with the ground." He had probably read of some historical event which he was thus trying to realise.

He was sent to a public school at Skien conducted by two theological postulants. All he learnt was the regular round of tasks and a little Latin. He took particular interest in the lessons on religion, and would sit for hours looking up the passages in the Bible to which references were given.

[Mr. J. B. Halvorsen in his article on Ibsen<sup>1</sup> has given a few most welcome details of Ibsen's school-life, which may be inserted here into Mr. Jæger's narrative :—

"Henrik Ibsen was placed at a small school, where he showed the greatest interest in history and religion. His master remembers him as a quiet boy, with strange eyes and an uncommon talent for drawing, but with nothing else remarkable about his appearance or tastes. A schoolfellow, however, remembers him better, and speaks of a fine head,

<sup>1</sup> *Norsk Forfatterleksikon*, Parts 22 and 23, 1889.



a good intellect, a rather quick, irritable, and vehement temper, a sharp tongue, a satirical humour, but at the same time a friendly and companionable nature, as his distinguishing characteristics. He had a head above most people. He would read history, and more especially that of classical antiquity, with the greatest interest, and showed remarkable depth of apprehension. I remember too," the same writer had said in 1875, "how one day the whole class sat in perfect silence while Ibsen read us a composition of his own, in which he related a dream to this effect:—

"We were wandering on the high lands, when the darkness of night surprised us, bringing us to exhaustion and despair. Like Jacob of old, we lay down to sleep with our heads pillowed on stones. My companions soon fell asleep, but I could not. At last fatigue was too much for me, and in a dream I saw an angel standing over me who said, 'Rise up and follow me.' 'Whither wilt thou lead me in this darkness?' I asked. 'Come,' he said, 'I will show you a sight—human life in its reality and truth.' At this I followed him, full of dread, and we went down endless steps, till the rocks had piled themselves in huge vaults overhead, and before us lay a vast burial-ground, full of horrible tokens and symbols of mortality and change—a world of corpses, all fallen under the stroke of death; pale, faded, and extinguished splendour. Everywhere there was a dim gleam of light, like that reflected

on a churchyard from the church-walls and whitened crosses over the graves, while the bleached skeletons, which filled the dark void in endless ranks, stood in a brighter light, shed by themselves as it were. A cold horror came over me at the sight as I stood by the angel's side. 'Here you see—all is vanity.' Then there was a murmur, like the first low roll of a coming storm—a sigh breaking from a thousand breasts; and it rose to a howling blast, so that the dead were moved, and stretched forth their arms to me. And I woke with a scream, wet with the cold dews of night." Certainly a remarkable style for a lad not yet fifteen—for at that age Ibsen left school—and doubly noteworthy because, in this strange romance of the child, we may detect a tone which harmonises wonderfully with the fundamental key of the man's later poetry.

"On being questioned, Ibsen wrote that he well remembers having written this composition, which resulted in a coolness between him and the master who taught us our mother-tongue, of whom, however, he speaks as an otherwise admirable and cultivated man. The master had, in fact, taken it into his head that the boy had copied his theme out of some book, and when he put forward this hypothesis in class, 'I repelled it,' says Ibsen, 'with more energy than he approved of.'"]

When Henrik was fourteen, his parents returned to live in Skien. After a time he was confirmed, and then left home to earn his living and make his



own way in the world. Under the financial conditions which fettered him, there could be no question of choosing the career he might prefer; he must content himself with that which he could follow with the smallest outlay, and which would most quickly enable him to maintain himself.

Ibsen's wish was to become an artist. He had worked with steadily growing devotion at drawing and painting, and even went on with it after he had come before the public as a writer. How far he had any great talent in this direction I cannot here pronounce, for I have been unable to discover a single specimen of his artistic efforts.<sup>1</sup> But that it was more than a transient amusement is plain from the deep interest in pictorial art which he has preserved through all these years to the present day. The only possessions which Ibsen has laid himself out to acquire are pictures; and during his frequent and long visits to Italy he has made a very pleasing collection of pictures of the Renaissance, of which he is very fond, and which he carries with him, without counting the cost, wherever he proposes to remain for any length of time. His unerring and subtle judgment in matters of art also shows that he must have had some talent for it.

In his youth, however, there could, of course, be no idea of cultivating this talent; the means at his father's command were far too small. He was sent

<sup>1</sup> Botten-Hansen speaks of him as "a not unskilful dilettante painter." *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, 1863.

to an apothecary at Grimstad to study the business. He left his family and his native town at the age of sixteen, never to return excepting for two or three short visits.

What had he brought away with him from his life in his native town? It had at an early age laid a weight on his spirit. It had roused him to dread and horror of all the means employed by the State against those who by their own fault, or by inevitable fate and innocently, are at war with established order. The prison, the madhouse, the gallows, and public opinion had impressed themselves on his mind as a standing threat. The contrast of poverty and wealth had come home to him as his earliest experience. He had known both when he was old enough to think clearly, and he had at the same time learnt to feel the different social estimation in which the poor and the rich are held. All this had confirmed the reserve of which he carried the germs in his nature; it had thrown him back on himself, had made him taciturn, grave, and undemonstrative. His life had its roots, not in intercourse with his fellowmen, but in the world of thought and dreams.

Thus equipped, he set out from his native town for his new place of residence. He arrived there, as has been said, in his sixteenth year, and remained till he was nearly two-and-twenty. Thus he spent more than five years in this out-of-the-way nook. Grimstad is, in fact, a still smaller place than

Skien. When Ibsen lived there, it had not more than 800 inhabitants.

Like most of the towns of Norway east of Christiansand, it is a small seaport, well-to-do and substantial; and wealth means comfort. In so small a town the ideas of the residents do not soar high nor fly far. When the good folks venture out of doors, it is, as a rule, only to inquire whether "the ship" has come safely, or to look into the accounts of the last cargo. Rarely do the great events of the outer world send a feeble wave to die in these remote towns, and then the good folks only exchange a few sympathetic words when they meet in the street, shake their heads, and go on their way. In such a town there is but one club, one apothecary, one barber's room, and one inn. The apothecary's shop is the "Exchange," where all the idlers of the place meet to discuss the events of the day, especially the home-news, which is always the most interesting. Every man bows to his neighbour; the richest man gets the lowest bows, the next richest has the next degree of respect, and so on to the workman, who has no more than a nod, while he stands reverently hat in hand. A stranger arriving in such a place is surprised at the respectful greeting he receives from every one he meets, and is made almost uncomfortable by so much politeness. This comes of his not being accustomed to these patriarchal institutions; but the simple native is, and thinks it

prudent to conform to them when he meets a well-dressed stranger in the street; for it is impossible to say that he may not be a person of quality. In such a place everything goes on quietly, steadily, and slowly. Every one has plenty of time, and hurry is a torment; for what is not done to-day may be done to-morrow. Everything which goes beyond the standard of custom is excess; personal peculiarity is accounted a fault; every exceptionally vigorous expression of individual vitality is regarded as eccentricity, and eccentricity is a crime.

But beyond lies the sea, mighty and wide, bringing in money and wreckage, and the latest Paris fashions from the great restless world so far away, to the little dead-alive town. Such are these little seaports even now; and such undoubtedly was Grimstad in Ibsen's youth, and for long after.

We know what Ibsen's life was in this little community from the description he has given in the preface to *Catilina*. We know that these five years were to him a period of evolution and fermentation. He bore within himself bold plans for the future, and vast conceptions possessed his soul. He would not be content to remain an apothecary; he would, at any rate, climb a step higher on the social ladder: he would study medicine and become a doctor. And at the same time the poetic gift first began to stir within him and show signs of life. He stole hours for study, and

from those stolen hours he again stole minutes for writing verse.

It was 1848-49. The revolution of February, and the political events which followed, set Europe in a turmoil, and this unrest was reflected in the mind of young Henrik Ibsen. He watched the progress of events, so far as was possible for an apothecary's apprentice in Grimstad, and with youthful enthusiasm ranged himself on the side of those who fought for freedom and against the oppressors in every land. These sympathies find utterance in the verses he wrote at this time. Thus, when in August 1849 the Magyars had suffered a decisive defeat, he wrote a glowing poem, *Til Ungarn* (To Hungary), in which he gave expression to his grief at their overthrow and that of liberty; but he ends with finding consolation in the thought that the Hungarian champions of freedom who had been slain, like those of Poland, and those others who had watered the soil of Germany with their blood from the scaffold, would stand forth as a splendid example to future generations :—

Yes! when 'gainst the thrones of tyrants rise as one the  
bold young races,  
Like an autumn tempest smiting pillars of the kings' high  
places,  
Then shall soar the name of Magyar, and, the hush all  
rent asunder,  
From the throats of conquering legions, like a splendid  
watchword, thunder.

It was at this time that he wrote the series of sonnets on the Danish-German war which he mentions in the preface to *Catilina*. There were twelve of them, and they bore the threatening title *Vaagner, Skandinaver* (Awake, Scandinavians).<sup>1</sup> This was a sort of prelude to *En Broder i Nød* (A Brother in Need), in which the young writer proclaims in burning words that Norway and Sweden must hasten to help Denmark if they hope to save their honour and secure their own position for the future as independent states.

That a young man in so modest a rank of life should dare to have such thoughts, and utter them in verse to boot, could not, of course, remain unnoticed in so small a place, all the less as under such momentous circumstances he could not refrain from speaking out in a vehement manner which matched with his poetry. Was a greenhorn apothecary's apprentice to dare to speak in the presence of his elders on matters on which they themselves did not venture to have an opinion? This was really going too far!

Nor was this the end of the matter. Ibsen, having fallen out with his neighbours, was not therefore disposed to withdraw from the arena. He had the shyness of a reserved man who hesitates to put himself forward, and the timidity of a retiring nature which dreads making a noise and

<sup>1</sup> *Et oppraab til de norske og svenske brødre* (An Appeal to our Norwegian and Swedish Brothers) was the whole title.



hearing ironical laughter ; but for that very reason he regarded the fact that his utterances had aroused wrath and mockery as a great event, and instead of retreating before his assailants, he put himself in an attitude of aggression. The young and undeveloped genius set his lance with youthful confidence at the little provincial community. "I owe it to truth," he says, whimsically enough, in the preface to *Catilina*, "to add that, by thus coming forward, I justified no very great hope that Society might reckon on any increase of citizen virtue in me ; since I had run the gauntlet, with epigrams and caricatures, against many a one who had deserved better of me, and whose friendship I really valued. However, while the great struggle was raging outside, I remained on a war-footing against the little world in which I found myself stuck fast by circumstances and the requirements of life."

It may be said, of course, that this whole affair was only a storm in a puddle ; but how characteristic of Ibsen ! How plainly it points to his later attitude towards Society !

The relations between the individual and the commonwealth are, as a rule, understood to be peaceable. Society is an agreement between various and several persons to do or to leave undone certain things ; the welfare of the whole is the welfare of the individual. Society is thus the protector of the individual on condition that the individual fulfils certain obligations to Society — obligations which

tend to maintain and strengthen the system of reciprocal defence on which their existence is based, and to secure the equable and healthy progress which is their end and object. But so idyllic and peaceful a connection as this presupposes does not actually exist between Society and the individual; it has its darker aspects; and the worst of these is the tendency of Society to domineer over its separate members. Society constantly manifests a disposition to exert its governing influence over departments where it is forbidden to intrude, and strives to lay down laws and limitations for the individual in cases where he has a right to be his own master. For instance, each man has a right to be independent and unfettered in his opinions and convictions; and in such matters Society is especially inclined to give those of the majority the authority of a standard, and to condemn the individual who fails to observe it. The smaller the community, the more it insists on taking private concerns under its jurisdiction, and the more is it disposed to lay down the law; and in cases where the individual is a law to himself, it manifests even less disposition to recognise the justification of an exception. In this there is a danger, not alone for private liberty, but for Society itself; for its progress depends on originality, and originality is the exception to the rule. Hence genius is the most important and necessary exception of all; and when Society has so narrowed its bounds that there is no room for genius, it becomes



needful for genius to revolt against Society, and make the exception the rule, in opposition to the tyranny of law.

Thus, in particular cases, the attitude of the individual to Society is one not of friendly necessity, but of hostile antagonism. Society then has to be considered as the tyrant rather than the protector of the individual, as suppressing rather than promoting personal development ; and law as an instrument of torture, in which the individual is crushed or stretched till it fits the accepted pattern-mould. And these are the ideas which have given rise to the anarchical theories of government of our day.

Henrik Ibsen, while still but an apothecary's apprentice at Grimstad, already found himself in this hostile attitude to his immediate neighbours ; it was the pale young dawn of those views which afterwards flashed forth with such vivid clearness from a whole series of works in his riper age.

It was under these conditions that he proceeded with his preparations for examination on Sallust's "*Catilina*" and Cicero's "*Orations*."

He assimilated these works on the anarchist of ancient Rome ; and out of Sallust's hypocritical moral indignation and Cicero's advocate's eloquence, an image of the rebel Catiline rose before Ibsen's mind, which, in more ways than one, shadowed forth his own later development.

The Swedish critic Vasenius has set himself the task of proving that the Catiline of Ibsen's drama is a

faithful picture of the historical Catiline.<sup>1</sup> But, interesting as his attempt is from an æsthetic point of view, it is of small psychological value, for it teaches us nothing of the poet's relation to his subject as it presented itself to him. The poet of *Catiline* had, in fact, no idea of the historical investigation to which the Finland critic refers. He knew Catiline only from Sallust and Cicero. The only historical research worth making in such a case would be a comparison of Ibsen's work with those authorities, to see whether he has been faithful to them. In this place it will suffice to examine a few leading points.

On comparing the Catiline of Sallust and of Cicero, the only difference we detect is one, not of nature but of degree. In the eyes of both he is simply an unbridled fortune-hunter, whose only concern is to satisfy his passions, and who, in a sort of desperate frenzy, clutches at desperate means when he cannot attain his ends by legitimate ways. To Ibsen, on the contrary, he is first and chiefly an indignant idealist, who, seeing the unfathomable rottenness of the times, is horrified, but who is nevertheless too much the spoilt child of that degenerate age to come forward with any success as a reformer of it. Catiline acts and talks as though he were half a Cato. We have only to read the description he gives of the state of Rome in the first scene :—

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<sup>1</sup> Valfrid Vasenius : *Henrik Ibsens dramatiska diktning i dess första skede*, estetisk undersökning, p. 50.

Far more than ever  
Injustice rules us here and tyrant-counsels.  
In name the state may still be a republic ;  
And yet each free-born burgher prove a bond-slave,  
A debtor, one dependent, like a thrall,  
Upon the leave and largess of a Senate.  
Our ancient social spirit all has vanished,  
Gone is Rome's boasted liberal independence ;—  
Life and security of limb have grown  
Gifts that man's gold must purchase from the Senate.  
Not justice now, but force must be obeyed,  
And coarsely browbeats all that's fair and noble.

And the poet undoubtedly intended to be taken  
literally when he makes Catiline describe himself  
immediately after as—

A man whose heart burns in the cause of freedom,  
A foe of violent unrighteousness,  
A friend of all who are oppressed and weak,  
Eager and bold to lay the tyrant low.

And again, when he afterwards makes him speak  
of his scheme as follows :—

My whole design is civic liberty,  
And civic thought as in the days of old  
It ruled amongst us. Back will I recall  
Those golden years when every Roman gave  
His life's blood gladly for his country's honour,  
And laid down all he had to serve the people.

In one place, indeed, the author makes him speak  
of Cato by name, when alluding to his projects :—

Yet once I dreamed, and mighty visions passed  
Before my brain, and drew me after them.

I dreamt that I, like Icarus, was borne  
On mounting wings under the cope of heaven ;  
I dreamt that to my hand the gods had granted  
A giant's strength, and bade me wield the lightning,—  
And that its bolt in this right hand was grasped,  
And flung down on the city far beneath me.  
And that red flames arose and licked the life out,  
Till Rome was a brown heap of dusty ruins.  
Then cried I with a voice exceeding loud,  
And called the friends of Cato from their graves ;  
A thousand phantoms came at my appeal,  
Took life, and lifted Rome out of her ashes.

In the whole of this speech on citizenship and civic freedom, in this outburst against oppression and injustice, Ibsen's revolutionary enthusiasm rings out. General and indefinite as it is, it nevertheless stands forth in *Catilina* as a literary monument of the revolutionary ferment of the forties. The revolution of February had confessedly a social aspect ; and in this there was a point of contact with Catiline which might have sufficed to make him the hero of any really revolutionary poet of the day ; for Catiline's programme was to some extent socialist. When Cicero tells us that he denied that any man who was not himself poor could be regarded as a true defender of the cause of the poor,<sup>1</sup> this is a characteristic which such a poet would inevitably have utilised. Ibsen, however, lets it pass almost unnoticed ; he gives a free rendering of the phrase,

<sup>1</sup> "Negavit miserorum fidelem defensorem inveniri posse, nisi eum, qui ipse miser esset."

"a friend of the oppressed and weak," and lets it drop. The socialist side of the revolutionary movement of that time had evidently not as yet caught hold of him. Catiline's plots took the form in his drama of an essentially political and vaguely revolutionary tendency, to which Ibsen gave substance and shape, and he clothed them in verse only so far as the various historical situations required. Rome in Catiline's day was a republic tottering to its fall; hence his schemes were directed to a reconstruction of old republican Rome; while the leaders of the revolution of the forties desired, not to reinstate an ancient type of state, but to create a new one.

Thus *Catilina* is to some degree no more than the political treatment, in the form of a historical drama, of Ibsen's feelings and impulses at that time. It is so precisely in so far as that the poet puts his most secret thoughts and dreams into his hero's mouth. In the letter, so often mentioned, from Ibsen's sister, she relates a conversation she had with her brother about that time on the occasion of one of his visits to his home. It was in a walk to Kapitelsbjerget, a hill near Skien, on which stand the ruins of an old convent-chapel. He explained to her that his aspiration "was to reach the highest and most perfect attainable pitch of greatness and clearness."

"And when you have reached it, what next?" she asked.

"Then I would die," he replied. This ideal, high-flown, and disinterested ambition of his youth is to be found exactly expressed in the following lines from *Catilina* :—

If but for one brief moment I could flame  
And blaze through space, and be a falling star ;  
If only once, and by one glorious deed,  
I could but knit the name of Catiline  
With glory and with deathless high renown,—  
Then should I blithely, in the hour of conquest,  
Leave all, and hie me to an alien shore,  
Press the keen dagger gaily to my heart,  
And die ; for then I should have lived indeed.

But exact as this picture of Catiline's ideal cravings was of those of his poet, Ibsen, as he worked out the drama, had to deviate from it to lay the basis of the tragical issue.

When Ibsen's Catiline succumbs, without having realised his great dreams, two causes have led up to it. One is to be found in the contemptible men about him, who are incapable of appreciating the worth of such noble and lofty projects, but will fight only for selfish ends. Recognising this, Catiline is driven to the Nihilist vision of destruction, to which he gives utterance as follows :—

So be it ; if *ancient* Rome cannot be lifted  
By this my hand, *our* Rome at least shall perish !  
Shortly, where shafts of marble now are soaring,  
Shafts of grey smoke shall reel through conflagration,  
Temples and palaces be rolled in ruins,  
And even the lordly Capitol be shattered.



And even this negative catastrophe, as he presently perceives, can never be achieved with this herd of wretches and cowards who have gathered round him out of neediness and the desire for plunder. Then, for the first time, revenge seems the only solution :—

Revenge above all hope, above all dream !  
To crush as I by hostile fate am crushed !  
Revenge for all this life-long laceration !

Thus the baseness of his adherents draws him away step by step from his ideal schemes, drags him on to denial, falsehood, and the thirst for revenge, and finally justifies his fate.

But, as has been said, there is another cause to be discerned for its justification, and this is Catiline's personal character. Ibsen, in fact, has not made his hero an ideal abstraction. He has, no doubt, equipped him with several characteristics which raise him high above the common crowd ; he represents him as bold, valiant, compassionate, and a lover of truth, and above all has given him an ideal aim which makes him superior to his fellows ; but with all this he has given him strong passions of the fiercest type. Ibsen never for a moment doubted that Cicero and Sallust were in the right when they say that Catiline had lived a licentious life and given himself over to the wildest debauchery. There is a hiatus in his nature, an antagonism in himself, which contributes to bring about his doom.

Thus Catiline at last appeared to Ibsen as a man of grand projects, with a noble desire to carry out something great and good, but without any support from those among whom he lived, and without the purity of character or firmness of will which are indispensable to the man who would attain a great end. For this reason, Ibsen, in the preface to the second edition, could say with perfect justice: "Many things on which my later poems have turned are here dimly shadowed forth—such as the discrepancy between our desires and our power of fulfilling them, between will and possibility, between humanity and the individual, between tragedy and comedy."

In the play this antithesis is not alone in Catiline's nature; it is embodied in two women, Aurelia and Furia. They are not so much two women as two elementary principles, who contend around the central figure while they combat each other. It might almost be said that they are his thoughts and feelings which have assumed visible shape. Aurelia, Catiline's wife, is represented as his better self; she, at certain moments, is able to arouse all that is sweet and gentle in his nature. But Furia, the vestal virgin, has far greater power over him; she it is who fires him to deeds both good and evil. She is at the same time a Valkyrie who beckons him on to fight for the high prize, and an avenging goddess who drives him to perdition; and she knows what she is doing, for though she loves Catiline, she



is always meditating how she may be revenged on him for having seduced her sister Silvia, and so having caused her death.

Still, abstract and didactory as these two figures may seem in this play, we nevertheless discern in them the germ of the two leading female types which constantly stood in the foreground of Ibsen's imagination, and by degrees assumed their place in his poetical work. Aurelia is the representative of gentle love, which sacrifices all and devotes itself wholly; she is the first sketch of one whole gallery of Ibsen's women, and, as is always the case with the first sketch, she is rather heavily and extravagantly delineated. Her self-devotion, gentleness, and sweetness know no bounds; she is in these respects almost superhuman. The main features of her later-born sister-figures are, however, easily recognisable.

Not less recognisable is Furia as the prototype of another important, though less numerous, group. She is a wild Valkyrie, planned for great achievement, and as such she already displays the main features of a Hjördis. When she says of her own life :

Ah me ! this aimless path, this empty traffic,  
A life as faint as any lamp's last flicker !—  
How small a field for all my multitude  
Of wide ambitions and of hot desires !  
Crushed close and tight within these narrow walls,—  
Here life grows stiff as death, here hope is quenched,  
Here daylight sneaks to an untimely close,  
And not a thought conceived is born an act,

we distinctly see the figure of Hjördis in the distance. The one difference is that Furia is fettered to the Temple of Vesta, as one of the attendant virgins, while Hjördis is fettered to Gunnar's court, as being his wife; and when Furia, a moment later, proposes to Catiline to fly with him to a far-away foreign land, there to begin a new life of great deeds and lofty effort, we are irresistibly reminded that Hjördis makes the very same proposition to Sigurd. The inborn thirst for vengeance on the man they love, they have in common, although on dissimilar grounds; and each at last stabs him to the heart in order to attain among the shades to a union which in life was impossible.

At the time when *Catilina* was written, Ibsen, so far as he can remember, had read no dramatic works but those of Holberg and of Oehlenschläger. There is something in *Catilina* which might otherwise suggest Shakespere's tragedies; in the last act especially, we are occasionally led to think of the last act of *Julius Cæsar*; but Ibsen then knew Shakespere only by name, so that there can have been no direct influence. He had been compelled to be, to a great extent, his own teacher in his preparations for examination, and it was the same with regard to his early dramatic efforts. He had not as yet learned much from Oehlenschläger. All he had directly derived from him was the idea of using the unrhymed five-foot Iambic metre; and in his treatment of it there is much that suggests

Oehlenschläger's influence; but the restless and seething vigour of youth finds it impossible to remain within the limits it has prescribed itself. The Iambic metre is presently too monotonous; he needs a verse of more lyric stamp; he deviates into long passages in rhymed Iambics, and at last breaks into noble trochaic strophes of a rolling lyrical type.

Not less characteristically tumultuous is the scenic treatment of the subject. The three acts take place in no less than nine scenes. The first especially is quite Shakesperian in its frequent changes of background; there are five,—one, in fact, for each scene. In the second act there is an improvement; it needs but three; and the whole third act is performed in one and the same place. It is evident that as the author proceeded he acquired greater practice in stage requirements.

Yet more singular is the development of the drama. There is no suggestion of a counterplot, properly speaking; not one of Catiline's opponents appears on the stage; consequently there is very little dramatic action, and equally little dramatic conflict. Furia alone, by her passion for revenge, helps to hasten the development; the treachery of Curius is only the ostensible cause of the catastrophe, and the false conduct of Lentulus is an episode which has no influence whatever on the progress of events. The drama is essentially one of mental conflicts; it is evolved entirely in Catiline's soul. And yet it has strong dramatic interest.

In the vigour with which the psychological evolution is worked out, from Catiline's self-accusations in the first dialogue, through his deceptions and errors, till madness at last clouds his conceptions—in the vigour with which this is depicted the reader can now discern the gift of the future master in the domain of the psychological drama, in spite of youthful deficiencies and inexperience.

Ibsen's countrymen know what was the fate in store for *Catilina* when it had received the finishing touch. Its defects of form were too self-evident for it to find favour in the eyes of either managers or publishers. The managers politely but decisively refused it; and as to the publishers, they named various sums as the price of its production at the author's expense. When, at last, the piece was printed in Christiania, at the cost of a liberal and enthusiastic friend, fortune was not much kinder. In the student world, no doubt, the play aroused some attention and interest; but the critics spoke of it as immature, and the public were totally indifferent to it. While they crowded to the theatres to see such trifles as, for instance, *Til Sæters* (At a Highland Cow-house), there was scarcely a soul to buy the promising first-fruits of a poet's pen, who was destined to become the foremost dramatist of Norway, and one of the most remarkable in all literature. In spite of the opinion of an accepted authority of those days, Professor M. J. Monrad, who replied to the critics and ex-

pressed his appreciation of the work, not more than thirty copies in all were sold. One of the few persons who had any taste for the book was a huckster; he considered the paper especially suited for wrapping parcels, and during Ibsen's first residence in Christiania this man bought of him and his friend, one evening when their stomachs were as empty as their purses, their whole stock of copies. "For the next few days we did not want for the necessities of life," says Ibsen laconically.

The picture which *Catilina* suggests of Ibsen himself, at this time twenty years of age, is extremely interesting; still, as I have shown, the treatment of the subject in a dramatic form compelled him to depict Catiline as so far unlike himself that we can discern only a few points of resemblance between the author and his hero. It is not in our power to reconstruct a complete image of the young writer by the aid of his *Catilina*. Other materials must be sought; utterances of a more personal character are needed—letters, in short, or minor poems.

It is obvious that during Ibsen's residence in Grimstad he must have written other poems besides the political outcries he alludes to in the preface to *Catilina*. But hardly any of these early lyrical attempts have ever been printed. Two in the *Kristiania Post* newspaper—one of memorial verses to Oehlenschläger—are, so far as I know, all that ever saw the light, and that is but little. Ibsen himself no longer possesses a line of what he wrote at that

time. When, in the preface to the reprint of *Catilina*, he speaks of his political verse, he relies on memory, and cautiously adds, "so far as I can recollect."

But a singularly happy "concatenation of circumstance" has enabled me to discover that his youthful efforts have not entirely perished. There are indeed a number of them extant, and these serve to fill up in the most instructive way the portrait of the young poet as it is suggested in *Catilina*.

They form a collection of twenty-six poems, very neatly copied into a bound volume. One of them is dated 1847, when Ibsen was in his nineteenth year, three are of 1848, thirteen of 1849, and the rest of 1850. They were almost all written in Grimstad. Only the last two or three were composed after he had quitted that town.

We might at first be inclined to believe that such a collection of juvenile poems must be full of literary echoes, especially when we know of his other work that the author did not develop an independent style till a much later period. But in fact these early poems betray much less of literary reminiscence than might be expected. The form is, on the whole, marked by a facility which we should not have looked for from the author of *Catilina*, but it is not highly characteristic. The matter, on the other hand, certainly is.

At that time Welhaven was the ruling leader among the lyric poets of the North. His *Nyere*



*Digte* (New Poems), published in 1845, had marked an epoch in the domain both of romance and of the description of Nature. It was the "Ghost ballad" of the Romantic school, with its love of the Middle Ages, but it was also the "Dryad lyric," with its natural symbolism, which in this volume of poems had forced its way to the front. In Ibsen we find the trace of this influence in one place only, namely, in the poems entitled *Møllergutten* (The Lad of the Mill), which is furnished forth, in the manner of the day, with all the romantic paraphernalia of singing nymphs, harping nixies, and the rest. Otherwise Ibsen remained unaffected by this tendency; nay, he consciously set his face against it. In one poem, *Til Norges Skjalde* (To Norway's Bards), written early in 1850, he asks the poets why they rave about remote antiquity, the buried primæval world and its ruined remains; have they not received the gift of song to devote it

to the service of men that require  
To read on the lips of a bard's inspiration  
The meaning of sorrow and joy and desire?

They often sang of the Nature of Norway, but how could they forget her hearts? In those hearts lay the treasure for Norway's poets to bring to light, since it was their task to give a picture of the life of the people.

A foreknowledge of his own coming gift seems

to dawn in this youthful programme of Ibsen's, although it was not indeed in the field of the epic life of the people that it was to be exercised. But, in fact, at that time he made no attempt to write in accordance with his own theories. His poems of the time when he wrote *Catilina* are all purely subjective and personal—his own moods, his own thoughts and impressions. Of the future satirist hardly anything is perceptible; one slight and feeble effort at the satirical description of a ball, and that is all.

The keynote of these poems is elegiac rather than satirical. A breath of gentle, dreaming melancholy pervades many of them. The writer is more captivated by the silence of night than by the turmoil of day; he is one of those to whom moonlight is more poetical than sunshine. No less than six of the poems in this collection are in moonlight moods.

*Maaneskinsfart paa Havet* (A Moonlight Sail on the Sea), *Maaneskinsstemning* (A Moonlight Mood), *Maaneskinsvandring efter et Bal* (A Moonlight Walk after a Dance), such titles are explicit enough. The last-named is of more especial interest as it includes the "motive" of a fine later poem by Ibsen:—

Hush! what silence! from the ball-room sounds the  
voice of mirth no more;  
Not a wave of man or music breaks upon the night's calm  
shore.

Far to west a fleeting moonbeam greets, before the moon  
must go,  
Earth that sleeps in dream-oblivion under lilies of the snow.



Ah ! at length the ball is over ; but I see amid the white  
Shapes that weave the web of memory, one more sylph-  
like, slim and bright.

Sleep will wind his arms about me with the setting moon's  
last beam,  
Then my soul and she shall wander through the garden of  
my dream.

These lines, it will be seen, supply the leading idea which is worked out in *Borte* (Away), but it has undergone a characteristic transformation : the quiet "moonlight mood" has become uncanny night, where darkness broods and the night-wind wails. This poem has led Dr. Georg Brandes to observe that this, and other of Ibsen's best verses, show "that once in the struggle for life a lyrical Pegasus had been killed under him." If, indeed, it can be said with truth of the writer of the fourth act of *Brand* and of the death-scene in the oasis in *Peer Gynt* that his "lyrical Pegasus" is killed, these youthful elegiac verses, in spite of their imperfections, are sufficient evidence that it was then living. They are the production of a man whose sensitive nature has not yet been hardened in the "adequate heat" of which Ibsen speaks in a later poem, *Mindets Magt* (The Power of Memory).

But if he was not yet hardened, his innate tendency to reverie had developed itself. In these poems we find none of the social impulses of youth, not a verse in which Ibsen speaks as representing a class or group ; he always says *I*, not *We*. He is

everywhere alone, even among other men. He is always the introspective thinker, to whom the thought is of more value than the reality which has given it birth. He seeks reality merely to fertilise his own inner life of feeling and intellect; as soon as this end is accomplished, reality has lost its importance in his eyes.

When he dwells on the autumn, and joins in the old poetic lamentation over the short duration of summer glories and the departed bloom, he finds comfort in the reflection that there is one flower which survives in all its beauty, and that is memory; it justifies hope in a coming spring.

Or he dwells on the recollections of spring itself. That, too, is short, but it still lives in memory. So is it with the life of man. The joys of life are like a brief spring-time, but a sad quivering of the heart-strings reminds us of them for long afterwards.

The streams of melody are an echo of the dreams of flowers and the songs of spring.

In the political songs the significance of memory in the life of the people is insisted on: it enables the nation to keep its head up under adversity. A people who cannot find the comfort of memory in an honourable past is a most unhappy one.

He deadens his sorrow at the departure of a friend by throwing the tender light of the hour of parting on every remembrance of their friendship;

and yet another poem speaks of memory as the refuge of the lover when his beloved one is lost.

Like Falk in *Kærlighedens Komedie* (The Comedy of Love), he believes far more firmly in the elevating influence of loss and remembrance than in that of joyful possession. That joy must be brief or it palls—that is to say, it ceases to be joy. As we read all this glorification of memory, we are irresistibly reminded of Brand's words—

Loss is all thy winning gains,  
Only what is lost remains.

We see how far back in Ibsen's life this idea had its root, and understand what a deep hold it had taken in his introspective and idealistic nature.

There are, however, less sweet and sentimental poems in this little collection—poems which show that even in his twentieth year Ibsen had begun to nurse that preference for the gloomy, solemn, and grave side of life which afterwards so strongly tinged his work. It is not moonlight only, but blackest night. For instance, he dwells on the sense of mystery which fills the soul during a storm at night; or he sits on a dreary autumn evening, gazing thoughtfully into the fire while the storm roars outside and the rain beats on the window. He wanders out at nightfall to his favourite haunt—a dark and lonely spot in the forest—and when a storm comes up, and the wind shrieks in unison with the cry of the screech-owls, he is quite in

his element; "the wild horror" which comes over him is congenial to him :—

Beneath the rage of wintry storm  
Joy hath my heart confessed,  
With Nature's very face and form  
A mirror of my breast.

And finally he depicts the midnight hour in a graveyard, and drifts from this picture into the old legend of the Dance of Death. The clock strikes twelve from the church-tower, and, as in Goethe's *Der Todtentanz* and Saint Saën's *Danse Macabre*, the dead rise from their graves and whirl in a wild maze round and about the churchyard. The measure is beaten by dead feet and rapped out on skulls till the clock strikes one, and the wraiths vanish beneath the tombstones. Thus Ibsen's well-known "affinity with the mysterious" had its origin far back in his early youth.

It is no less interesting to study his earliest reflections and meditations. In a poem written when he was twenty and called *Tvivl og Haab* (Doubt and Hope), he comes forward as a disbeliever in the dogmas of the Church. This in itself, to be sure, is not uncommon; but it is undeniably quite uncommon that the doubts of such a youth of twenty should react upon themselves, and that the sceptic should grieve over his own defection. It is seldom that a sceptic of twenty bewails his departed childhood, and the loss of the childlike nature which sees in faith the path he can no longer find.

No less rare is it to find a poet of this age—the age of self-confidence and overweening schemes for the future—admitting doubts of his own powers, and giving utterance to them in his verse. In the earliest poem in this collection, *Resignation*, the writer asks himself whether his dream of being a poet is not perhaps a mere illusion. He seems greatly disposed to reply in the affirmative, and at the end of this examination he sings in a sorrowful strain of the foaming wave which gathers and rolls onward, but at last is dashed against a cliff, and leaves not even a memory behind, for the next wave washes away every trace of it.

It was with such thoughts and fancies as these that young Ibsen busied himself in his hours of solitude. And when he mixed with other young persons of his own age, he was no less apart from them. He himself tells us that his political enthusiasm sometimes ran away with him, and led him to say the most reckless things; but this did not often happen. As a rule, he was more concerned with thinking out his ideas than with uttering them. A lady who was at that time living at Grimstad speaks of him as going about like a “seven-sealed mystery.” His appearance was gloomy and grave, almost wierd. Some of the women of his acquaintance were disposed to ask themselves what in the world this strange creature had within him; others were frankly afraid of him. Nor need this surprise us,

for it would be difficult to imagine a man more utterly unlike the "nice young man" according to the notions of a country damsel. Imagine him at a ball! While his companions gave themselves up to pleasure and enjoyment, he would stand meditating on all the sorrow and misfortune which lurked in the background beneath the cheerful surface, wondering how many of the dancers were waltzing only to forget their woes. Indeed, he found a particular charm in dwelling on such images: to him they were at least as important an element in the poetry of the scene as the dancing and merriment.<sup>1</sup>

And again in his lonely corner he wonders, "What is it that animates all these gay and smiling forms? Was it in the expectation of finding happiness and satisfaction that they came hither? Have they found what they sought, or does this ball-room scene give us a true notion of the drama of human life?"

And what is that notion? Longing, hoping, and disappointment—in these three words the life of man is summed up!

The man who at so early an age drifts into these reflections at the sight of human festivity has already won a standpoint from which to look on the world from outside; he is not made to be in it and of it. Nature and experience alike have sealed him as a

<sup>1</sup> An exact account of one part of the collection entitled *Balminder, et Livsfragment i Poesi og Prosa* (Reminiscences of a Ball, a Fragment from Life, in Prose and Poetry).



solitary soul. Even if for a moment he should ever feel a desire to mingle in the maze, even though he should feel himself attracted by some one in the crowd, he will soon shrink back into himself like the sensitive plant, which furls its leaves at the lightest touch.

There are erotic passages in his *Balminder*, but his erotics, too, are all his own. He had already written love-verses; but they were not addressed to any woman on earth; they were dedicated to a "dream-face" called up by an unsatisfied and perhaps unattainable craving. Even the features of this face are not borrowed from earthly prototypes. But at this ball he sees a beautiful pair of eyes, and lo! the ideal is realised. He had of course imagined the woman he could love as just such another. He dances with her, intoxicates himself with long gazing into her clear eyes, and is in the seventh heaven of rapture. "What are the struggles and disappointments of a whole lifetime against such a half-hour as this?" But even then and there he is a match for it all.

"Fate! remove this superabundance of happiness far from me. Let not this hour be profaned by protraction. I have found her. What more can I want?"

And fate hears him. He learns that she is betrothed, and then she has fulfilled her destiny so far as he is concerned; she has taught him "to long, to hope, and to be disappointed." She is unnecessary to his further development; that must be in himself, in his memories.

Do we not recognise in this development, based on Ibsen's idealistic and anti-realistic nature, Falk's longing for a woman to love? How characteristic, and how like Falk, is the cry, "Let not this hour be profaned by protraction!" Such a love as this has hardly any hold on reality. It begins with a dream-ideal; just comes into touch with reality by the transports of an evening at a ball; then passes away again into the realm of the ideal as a memory. It is like one of those comets which, in the course of their long wanderings through celestial space, rush for a moment across the earth's orbit to fly off again into infinitude.

This then is the picture of Henrik Ibsen which we reconstruct from his earliest poems. They can only very incorrectly be regarded as youthful compositions; for if they reveal any one thing more plainly than another, it is that Ibsen never had any real youth. He had indeed the ideal cravings, the ecstasies and enthusiasms of youth; but he never knew the happy thoughtlessness which is its peculiar prerogative; he never was one of those "to whom play is enough"—to use his own expression.

Still, youth's rich store of possibilities was his in a rare measure. All the characteristics of genius which he unfolded as a poet are to be found in germ in these early poems. But long waiting and many struggles were to be his portion before they could mature and bloom.



## CHAPTER II.

### EARLY YEARS IN CHRISTIANIA (1850-1857.)

HENRIK IBSEN arrived at Christiania in the month of March 1850, to finish his studies for examination. Like every other man who at that time was anxious to get into the University as quickly as possible, he went to the school kept by Heltberg, a crammer, and a very gifted and original teacher, by whom, in the course of a year or two, the raw materials of youth were hammered and moulded into practical student form. Much has been written concerning Heltberg, his school and his methods. Björnson has immortalised his teacher in a fine poem, and Arne Garborg has given a vivid picture of the school and its master;<sup>1</sup> and no one who has ever written a biographical notice of Ibsen has omitted to mention that Aasmund Olafssøn Vinje and Björnsterne Björnson were Ibsen's fellow-students.

The evidence of all their contemporaries concurs in representing Heltberg's method as wonderfully attractive and inciting. In his opinion Latin meant logic; and as they laboured through the ponderous

<sup>1</sup> Björnson, *Digte og Sange* (Poems and Songs), 2nd edit. p. 154.  
Arne Garborg, *Bondestudentar* (Peasant-Students), pp. 77-91.

sentences and involved periods of the Roman classics, he enlarged to his disciples on the laws of thought itself. Added to this, his instruction was always vivid and striking; he always had some happy illustration to clear up a grammatical peculiarity or to emphasise an error, and he would do it with so much wit that he often set a whole class laughing.

That Ibsen profited by such teaching, not merely as a satirist, but as a man, need not be said; still he cannot have gained very much, for his attendance at these classes was all too short. Being older than most of the pupils, and also much poorer, he was obliged to keep his preparation within the narrowest possible limits. After a few months' study he went up for his examination; that the result under such conditions could not be brilliant is very evident.<sup>1</sup>

But even while he was still at work, he came before the public with a new piece. He found time to set forth his revolutionary tendencies in the form of a second dramatic effort.

A native of South Jutland, named Harro Harring, had come to Norway in 1849. In his early and very chequered life he had taken part in the Greek struggle for freedom, and in several revolutionary outbreaks. At the beginning of 1850 he brought out a play called *Testamentet fra America* (The American Will), and as, in the opinion of the

<sup>1</sup> Greek and Mathematics were his weak points. He could not therefore pass as "unmatriculated," but he subsequently took the degree of Doctor of Philology, *hon. causa*. Halvorson, *Norsk Forfatterleksikon*. pts. 22, 23.

authorities, this outstepped the due limits of the freedom of the press, the author was banished from the country by a royal rescript of the 27th of May. On the morning of the 29th, the police entered his dwelling, captured his person, and conducted him on board a steam-ship, where he was treated as a prisoner till the vessel sailed. As soon as the news of this got wind, a meeting to protest was called for the same afternoon at five o'clock. A protest was, in fact, hastily drawn up, and signed on the spot with about a hundred and forty names. One of the persons present, and who signed it, was Henrik Ibsen. His schoolfellow Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson did the same.

On leaving the place of meeting, the whole party proceeded in a compact procession to the residence of the premier town-councillor, and a deputation laid the document before him. The whole assembly then made their way to the quay. The deputation went on board the packet and addressed a few words to Harring. When he first came on deck, he was hailed with three times three cheers, and then there was a cheer for Norway and freedom. Ibsen from first to last was an eager participator in this affair, the only political demonstration in which he ever took part. It was about this time that he wrote his second drama. He took advantage of the Whitsuntide holidays to put on paper a one-act play called *Kjaempchöjen* (The Warrior's Barrow), which was accepted by the theatre at Christiania,

and performed on the 26th of September in that year.

*Kjaempenhöjen* is by no means so interesting a play as *Catilina*. It is in form and matter a direct outcome of the study of Oehlenschläger's Northern tragedies.

During a raid on the coast of Normandy, a Norse Viking, Audun, is abandoned, dangerously wounded. A maiden named Blanka, who has escaped death at the hands of the fierce Vikings, finds and rescues him. When he has recovered from his wounds, he builds himself a hut, where he dwells as a hermit with his foster-daughter, who has converted him to Christianity. His new faith fills him with aversion for the wild life of the Vikings, and in token that his past career is ended he buries his sword and armour, and raises a barrow over them. Long years after, his son Gandalf comes to Normandy with his followers, to avenge the death of his father. He is about to kill both Blanka and the recluse; but the meek and forgiving spirit which breathes in their words makes it hard for him to shed their blood, and in order to keep his vow to be revenged or die, he dedicates himself to death. Hereupon Audun throws off his hermit's frock and explains the situation. Gandalf returns to Norway with Blanka as his bride, but Audun prefers to remain as a recluse till death, and stays behind.

All these characters have their prototypes in Oehlenschläger's tragedies. The old Viking, who

ends his days in holiness on a Southern shore, where he quarrels one fine day with the natives, is a figure which Oehlenschläger has repeatedly introduced. In *Vaeringerne i Miklagaard* (The Normans in Constantinople), he appears as the old Syrian hermit, who turns out to be none other than Olaf Trygvason; and in the second act of *Landet fundet og forsvundet* (The Land Won and Lost), we find him again as the recluse Quetsalcoalt—the Iclander Björn, who quitted his native land when his lady-love married another. The contrast of Gandalf's Norse roughness and Blanka's Southern sweetness has also had its counterpart in the *Vaeringer*, in the contrast between Harald Haarderaade and Maria. Blanka is indeed the very double of Maria. Both are children of the South, both admire the strength of the North, each loves a Northern hero, each follows her lover to Norway, and regards it as her mission to exert a softening and pacifying influence over the people among whom it is her lot to live. But Ibsen treats it as a fundamental contrast between Christianity and paganism, while in Oehlenschläger's play it is that between Greek culture and Northern native power that is chiefly insisted on.

And, in spite of all this external influence, the conception here elaborated of the Viking age is immeasurably beyond Oehlenschläger's, and reveals the future author of *Haermaendene paa Helgeland* (The Vikings in Helgeland). These Vikings are fiercer and more violent than their immediate proto-

types; they are more completely barbarians, less civilised men. The critics of that day, fettered by Oehlenschläger's conception of primæval Scandinavia, found fault with them as being too rough and savage. On the whole, however, criticism was kind to the little piece, and the public received it favourably; it was performed three times, which, as theatres went in those days, was a very fair "run."

The performance of the "Warrior's Barrow" at the Christiania theatre led to Ibsen's being recognised there as an author. He at once gave up all notion of devoting himself to study.

With his friend Schulerud, a law-student, the author of *Catilina* established himself in a modest quarter of the town. The price he received for his play did not go far, and Schulerud's monthly allowance was anything rather than splendid. Nevertheless this devoted comrade shared it strictly and liberally with his friend. "But it did not suffice to secure them a dinner," says Botten-Hansen, "so they were forced to go without. To keep up appearances in the house, for fear this should be known, they went out at dinner-time, and did not return till an hour at which the people with whom they lodged might conclude that they had done their meal. Then they had coffee and ate bread with it, which had to do duty as dinner. At that time I met Ibsen and his friend almost every day, but cheerful and hearty as they always seemed, they



succeeded in concealing their rare frugality so effectually that for a long time I had no suspicion of it."<sup>1</sup>

This faithful and self-sacrificing friendship has linked Schulerud's name with Ibsen's in the most honourable manner, and the poet has commemorated his gratitude in a handsome tribute in the preface to the second edition of *Catilina*. He does not seem to have been in any other way remarkable; his intellectual qualities did not rise above the common level; but his fathomless devotion and unhesitating belief in his friend's genius had certainly a most beneficial effect on Ibsen's self-critical and too diffident nature.

Another lodger in the same house, Theodor Fredrik Abildgaard, a student, exercised a great influence over him. This young fellow had thrown himself heart and soul into the working-men's movement started by Marcus Thrane, an advocate of the revolutionary ideas of 1848. Abildgaard, who soon became one of the leaders of the movement, initiated both Ibsen and Schulerud into his plots. Ibsen had come to no clear or determined conclusion as to the socialistic ideas which formed the basis of the movement, nor could he decisively subscribe to the views of its leaders. Their schemes were indeed too fantastic, not to say childish, and the whole project too indefinite, too immature, and too recklessly planned for Ibsen to join it uncondi-

<sup>1</sup> *Biografi af Henrik Ibsen* in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, for 1863.



tionally. Still it appealed to him, for it meant life and air. He assisted at the meetings held in Abildgaard's rooms, and went about and was seen with him and the other leaders, and he wrote in the paper they issued.

After a time Abildgaard and Thrane were both apprehended, and their papers seized, including the various contributions to the journal. As there were among these, articles in Ibsen's writing, he was for some time afraid lest he should share his colleagues' fate, although what he had written was not dangerous and could not have led to his condemnation. However, thanks to the presence of mind of one of the conspirators, he was put to no inconvenience whatever. When the police entered, the editor of the paper simply tossed all the treasonable papers out on the floor, ostentatiously hiding those that were of no consequence. The police were actually misled, and the matter, so far as Ibsen was concerned, was at an end. Not, however, as concerned the leaders; they were condemned to a long imprisonment with hard labour for their socialist doings.

Two men may yet be mentioned with whom Ibsen at this time came in contact. These were Paul Botten-Hansen and Aasmund Olafssøn Vinje. It was in co-operation with them that, at the New Year, 1851, he started a little weekly paper, which, from the vignette on its title-page, was soon known by the nickname of *Manden* (The Man).

Both his colleagues were older than Ibsen. Vinje was thirty-three and Botten-Hansen six-and-twenty. Although these could boast of no literary achievements like Ibsen's, they were at that time his superiors in knowledge and general maturity. Botten-Hansen had already laid the foundations of his extensive acquaintance with foreign literature; more especially had he studied "Young Germany" *con amore*, and he published a series of papers on its writers in the above-named periodical. Vinje was less well-read, but his keen and strongly marked intellect had ripened and grown rich by the thoughts and experience of a chequered life, through a very hard struggle for existence. Ibsen's intercourse and labours in common with these two men undoubtedly exercised a valuable influence on his mental development.

The model from which "The Man" was imitated was Goldschmidt's *Korsaren*,<sup>1</sup> which had attracted much attention throughout Norway. Nor was the resemblance between the two publications merely external; there was an agreement in their political views. Both were on the side of the "Opposition;" and when "The Man" took up the cudgels against an accusation brought against Goldschmidt of not having placed himself at the service of any one idea, it was to a certain extent defending itself. Vinje, in the name of the editors, broke a lance for Gold-

<sup>1</sup> *The Corsair*, a brilliant and contentious Danish newspaper of the day, edited by a leading novelist, A. M. Goldschmidt.

schmidt against the *littérateurs* of the North, who echoed this favourite indictment. It was Goldschmidt's chief merit, he declared, that he had not attached himself to either of the contending parties ; for affiliation to a party leads to want of independence and to intellectual bondage. Genius is isolation ; it has this in common with the dumb creation, that it does not adapt itself to ordinary men, and it cannot be understood till some time has elapsed. The essay in which Vinje comes forward as an enthusiastic admirer of Goldschmidt is still remarkable in respect to its view of the relation of the majority to the individual, which afterwards found expression in Ibsen's play *En Folkefiende* (An Enemy of the People). The reason, however, why *Manden* took arms alike against the Government and the Opposition was, not that this periodical was intended to hold a position half-way between the extremes on each side, but, on the contrary, because it went much further than the Opposition, and so regarded that party as feeble and colourless. In the young editor of three-and-twenty we see anticipations of "An Enemy of the People," and his notions of home politics were already finding utterance in the satirical form which was a noteworthy feature in his youthful writings.

Ibsen had come to the capital with his head full of dreams of freedom, and fired with revolutionary zeal. He certainly had hoped to find in this focus of the intellectual life of the North a sympathetic

echo of all which was sounding so loudly in his own soul. His first act was to take part in a political demonstration; his next was to ally himself with the most radical of Radicals. But, as we have already seen, this friendship did not afford him what he sought.

Still, the seething unrest of the times could not fail to find utterance in the National Assembly. Antagonism to the Storthing seemed to him worthy of his enthusiasm. It was to him a matter of small moment what the ground of opposition might be; the main point was a firm and manly opposition. From this point of view the opposition to the Storthing of 1851 was anything rather than an inspiring theme for an enthusiastic young poet.

In 1848 there had been for a moment some promise that the political agitation of the time would not pass over the heads of the Opposition party in the Storthing without leaving some mark. But in the period between the closing of the Storthing in 1848 and the meeting of the next Storthing in 1851, many things had happened which were ill-adapted to infuse courage into the Radical party. Peace was restored in Europe and the rebels had been punished. The Opposition in the Norwegian Parliament of 1851 was the mildest and most submissive imaginable.

Ibsen's impression of this docility was one of disillusion. For the first time in his life it was clear to him that, in great things as well as small,

the ideal and the real were very different. The extinct opposition in the Storting filled him with scorn; in his eyes its members showed a contemptible lack of public spirit; and he thereupon wrote *Norma eller en Politikers Kjaerlighed* (Norma, or a Politician's Love), a musical tragedy in three acts. His first disgust called forth his first satire. Bellini's opera of *Norma* supplied the motive for this juvenile polemical work; for the parts of the *dramatis personæ* he substituted political magnates, and then lashed them with scourges of the heaviest calibre. The Opposition as a body were laughed to scorn for their weakness, in the character of Norma, and around her were grouped several members of the Thing, identified by name and stigmatised as fortune-hunters.<sup>1</sup>

His other political contributions to the paper are of less interest. Five of the poems which subsequently were included in the only published collection of his verse were here printed in their original form, from which the later one differs in many respects. Several of them, as, for instance, *Spillemaend* (The Musicians), *Fugl og Fuglefaenger* (Bird and Bird-catcher), and *Bergmanden* (The Mountaineer), show that his tendency to melancholy and mystery had increased.

These poems contributed to *Manden* lack originality, however. In one cycle of songs called *Helge*

<sup>1</sup> A full account of the opera, with political explanations, may be found in *Norske Forfattere* (Norwegian Authors), by H. Jaeger, p. 189.

*Hundingsbane* he has taken Oehlenschlaeger's romantic poems, *Helge*, 1814, and *Nordens Guder* (The Gods of the North), 1819, as his model. In *Eu Lördagsaften i Hardanger* (A Saturday Evening at Hardanger) he has attempted to give a picture of Northern peasant life in octosyllabic verse which betrays the immediate influence of Paladan-Müller, whose *Danserinden* (The Dancing-Girl) here appears in Northern attire. Nay, one poem, *Svanen* (The Swan), shows, both in form and matter, the influence of A. Munch's lines, *Hvor i verden jeg gaar* (Wherever I go). The absolute independence which had distinguished Ibsen's first attempts was evidently on the wane: he was losing it under the influence of literary study.

At the end of the first half year the periodical was christened *Andhrimmer*—after the cook in Valhalla who prepares the daily food of the Scandinavian gods, and it became a general weekly review of literature and politics; but neither in its first nor in its later form had it any great circulation—not so many as a hundred subscribers at any time. It died at the end of the third quarter.

After residing a year and a half in Christiania, Ibsen's position financially was as insecure as ever, though he had worked hard, not only as a dramatist, but as a lyric poet, political satirist, critic, and journalist. At the same time his writings had excited attention and made him a name; and when the newly established theatre at Bergen was in need



of a young stage-manager, the choice fell on him. He was appointed "theatrical poet" at Bergen on the 6th of November 1851, and in the following year the directors voted him a sum of 200 *speciesthaler* (about £45 or \$220) as travelling money, that he might spend three months abroad in training himself in practical stage-management. He, on his part, was to pledge himself on his return to hold the post of "theatrical instructor" for the term of five years. The salary indeed was low enough, only 300 sp. th. (£67 or \$330) a year; still, it was a small fixed income, and above all, the post he held gave him ample opportunities for the study of the drama.

It has been said that the dramatic writer is born, not made. "By sheer study a man may become a painter, a sculptor, a musician, but never a dramatic author," says no less an expert than Alexandre Dumas *fils*, in *Un père prodigue*. "A man is one or is not—as he is fair or brown, by no will of his own."

If this were true, the gift of writing for the stage must form a remarkable exception to the general laws of development, to which all else in living nature and in the intellectual world is subject; but in fact these laws admit of no exception. One of these laws is that a faculty is developed by using, but is dormant or degenerates if it is left idle. This law is as inevitably true of dramatic inventiveness as of any other faculty. If it were put to the test, it is



probably more true of this than of any other branch of literary work, since skill and technical practice are of greater moment in dramatic writing than in any other class of literary art.

And this technical skill is not to be acquired by theoretical study : it must be derived from practical experience. The stage-manager must watch each piece from the first rehearsal till it is put on the stage ; he must see it grow on the boards, and so throw himself into it as to feel actually one with the author ; he must picture to himself what will be effective, and what the effect will be, till at last comes the great test of the solution of the problem—the first performance. This, as a rule, brings many startling surprises. Things which he expected to “ tell ” fall flat ; others, of which he thought nothing, make their mark ; where only a smile was looked for, peals of laughter are heard, and *vice versa*. Then he begins to seek the causes, that is to say to understand and learn. Next time he is wiser ; but still there is much to surprise him, much to be learnt. Even when a man has spent his life at it, he can never arrive at such mastery as to be able to predict the effect of the details of a piece with any certainty. He may, however, get nearer and nearer to that point : he may learn to picture to himself the performance of a play while he writes it or reads it.

The importance of the fact that Henrik Ibsen became intimately connected with the stage at an early age cannot be too much insisted on. But for

this connection he never would have acquired that mastery of dramatic technique which is so justly admired in his plays. He continued to direct various theatres in the North for ten years, and rehearsed above a hundred plays. He could have had no better school. Of course they were a very various series of pieces with which he thus became practically acquainted: Shakespere and Holberg, Oehlenschläger and Heiberg, his own and Björn-sön's youthful plays were represented; but above all was he influenced by the constructive art of the French dramatic writers of the day, especially that of Scribe, though from the literary point of view Scribe's pieces did not greatly appeal to him. At the same time he did not particularly devote himself to study theoretical works on the drama. He read Heiberg's prose writings, especially the well-known essay on the *Vaudeville*; and during his tour abroad Herman Hettner's book, *Das Moderne Drama* (The Modern Drama), then just published, fell in his way. This he thought both interesting and helpful; but this was about the whole extent of his theoretical reading.

In Christiania he had had the opportunity of seeing a sound though not very brilliant school of acting. The Danish theatre in the Norwegian capital had at that time some very good artists, and these, as well as some less gifted actors, were held together by a time-honoured artistic tradition. They were all more or less closely connected with the flourishing period

of the Danish stage, dating from the early years of the century; and although the dramatic art of that day was too ideal in character, it was nevertheless marked by so many admirable qualities that it must certainly have been advantageous to a young author to come under its influence.

Added to this were the impressions he had gained during his visit as a student to Copenhagen and Dresden, in the summer of 1852. These were of quite a different nature. As it happened, the chief theatre at each of these towns was just then in a critical state of transition. In Copenhagen, as in Dresden, the academical and ideal drama was still in the ascendant, as represented in Denmark by such a director as Ludwig Heiberg, and in Prussia by the elegant and refined Emil Devrient. But in both towns, too, a youthful talent had come to the front on the boards, and laid down a new principle in art, that of Realism. In Dresden the restless and energetic Pole Dawison led the new school; at Copenhagen it was the gifted and cultivated Höedt. Höedt's artistic watchword was Nature; Dawison's was Passion; but, dissimilar as they were in temperament and artistic instinct, their struggle against the ideal and declamatory school was the same; and Ibsen, who had the opportunity of seeing them both, thus was first made acquainted with a fresh artistic tendency, corresponding to a new phase of contemporary dramatic literature. He saw both Höedt and Dawison play Hamlet, and was especially

charmed by Dawison's presentment of the part; while to Höedt he was indebted for much enlightenment from seeing him act the light-comedy part of Grignon in Scribe's *Bataille des Dames*.

The Bergen theatre had no such valuable impressions to offer him. Everything there had but just been started from the beginning. The theatre in Bergen was an outcome of the National feeling, which in the forties and fifties had risen to enthusiasm. The treasures of popular poetry brought to light by Asbjørnsen and Moe had fired the people with a transport of Nationalism, and Northern art and Northern romance were the result. Painters were to depict Northern nature, musicians were to play or harmonise Northern melodies, poets were to show us the people of the North—of the present or of the past. The *Volkslied* style was the style of the day, and the Scandinavian peasant its literary ideal.

The intelligent people of Bergen were in these matters no whit behind the inhabitants of the capital: on the contrary, they were even more zealous in making a display of national enthusiasm. Ladies frequented the public promenades of the town wearing knots of the National colours, and listened eagerly to the strains of *Sæterjentens Søndag* (The Herd-girl's Sunday). The theatre was crowded with men to admire the fiddling and the *Halling-kast* (a dance of the natives of Hallingdal) of genuine North-country peasants, and the represen-

tation of spurious theatrical peasants singing in the little vaudeville *Til Sæters*.

This National mania fell even on the cosmopolitan author of *Catilina*, and from the great historical struggles of the world which had occupied his mind in his apprentice and student days he now turned exclusively to the history of his own country. At the same time he keenly perceived all that was one-sided and superficial in the new impulse, and while he yielded to it, he could not help making fun of certain phenomena to which it gave rise. Before this, in Christiania, he had given utterance in a theatrical critique to his views of the true function of national poetry. "A National writer," he said, "is one who gives his work a predominant note which finds an echo in every mountain and valley, every cliff and strand, but above all in ourselves."

All the outward demonstrations, to which at that time so much importance was attached, were in his eyes mere trifling and meretricious frippery. But as a poet himself, he was not yet ripe to give expression to this conception; hence the first dramatic outcome of the influence on his mind of this Nationalist movement was a strange medley of Realism and National romanticism, which had no firm foothold either in reality or in romance.

*Sancthansnatten* (St. John's Eve), which was performed for the first time at Bergen on the 2nd of January 1853, has never been printed, and exists

only in a few MS. copies, which are hardly to be got at. I know the piece only from the account given of the performance by T. Blanc,<sup>1</sup> and, so far as we may judge from this report, it is not without points of resemblance to Shakespere's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. A kobold, or *Nisse*, here plays a part, as protagonist and wire-puller, analogous to that of Puck, and elves and kobolds appear on the stage in the more lyric scenes. But notwithstanding this romantic underplot, the real *dramatis personæ* are the ordinary humanity of the time, exactly as they are in *Mester og Lärling* (Master and Learner) and several other contemporary works by Hostrup.<sup>2</sup>

The scene of action is a farm in Thelemark, whither a party of ladies and students have come to keep St. John's Eve. A betrothal is to be celebrated at the same time, and punch is brought out into the garden, when the *Nisse* comes and squeezes the juice of a mysterious plant into the punch-bowl. All who drink of the liquor have the gift of no longer being cheated by appearances; a cloud falls from their eyes, and they see "the hidden power which reigns in the heart's inmost chamber."

But he that has nothing to ponder upon,  
Wanders in blindness, and sleeps like a stone.

As soon as the two pairs of lovers have drunk of the drugged punch, they wander up to the height

<sup>1</sup> *Norges første nationale scene*. T. Blanc, pp. 138, 150.

<sup>2</sup> Jens Kristian Hostrup, a Danish dramatist, born 1818.



where the St. John's fires are piled, and there the hill opens to the seers : they see the mountain-king surrounded by dancing elves and kobolds, while to prosaic eyes only ordinary maidens and lads are to be seen dancing round a bonfire, and the mountain-king himself is but a member of the committee. Among these work-a-day folk, however, there is a poet, and thus, under the influence of the Nisse's punch, a sort of romantic affinity has its rise. An explanation takes place between the two poetic souls ; they "find each other" in spite of the betrothal which had separated them ; and the prosaic couple are also matched together. And as, under the same influence, an old injustice, under which the poet-lover had suffered, is also rectified, the piece ends to the satisfaction of all parties. The play was unsuccessful, and in the history of its writer's experience it scarcely is of more importance than as an experiment for practice.

But Ibsen's next work gave brilliant evidence of the educational influence of his practical stage experience. This piece, brought out two years later, showed that his theatrical work had taught him to take advantage of certain principles laid down by Hermann Hettner in his little book. Hettner severely criticises the loosely written "chronicle style" of historical plays, which the admiration of Shakespere's had called into being, and upholds the necessity for strict construction, while he also maintains that a historical drama must at the same



time be a "psychological tragedy" of character, it is ever to be regarded as a serious work of art.<sup>1</sup>

*Fru Inger til Oestraat* (Dame Inger at Oestraat) is such a "tragedy of character," and the construction of the play is so vigorous and so firmly knit that the unity of time and place is preserved throughout. The whole action is worked out in a single night, and in the great hall of Fru Inger's house. In spite of a few somewhat lengthy scenes, we find here a dramatic power in the evolution of the plot, which holds our attention from beginning to end, as it were with an iron grip; and the sense of gloomy uneasiness which underlies the whole piece increases from act to act, from the eerie feeling in the first scene to the breath as from the tomb which parts Eline from Nils Lykke, and to the frenzy in which Fru Inger murders her own son.

Just such a night of horror is to be found in the episode of Norwegian history which Ibsen chose for dramatic treatment. It was at the time of Norway's deepest degradation. After Sverre's democratic rule, in the thirteenth century, had deprived the Scandinavian nobles of all political importance, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the families of the old nobility sank into lower and lower depths. The ancient families died out one after another, and their possessions accumulated in fewer hands. Still, increasing riches did not stay their fall; it was gradual but sure, like a slow

<sup>1</sup> H. Hettner, *Das Moderne Drama*, p. 39.

progress of decay.<sup>1</sup> "It may be said that the process was in many ways complete when the Reformation first made its way on to Scandinavian soil. After that time Norway was entirely bereft of any superior secular class, and only a few families of the lower nobility survived, who, neither by their wealth nor their political energy, stood in any marked degree above the better peasant class, so that their ancestral dignity was as nothing beyond their own immediate neighbourhood." But even at that time the nobles still formed the only class which could represent the people in the province of politics and on great public occasions; consequently the decay of the nobility was equivalent to a paralysis of the whole nation. Even at the beginning of the sixteenth century Norway was more than ever, as Sars puts it, "like a tree deprived of all its branches, or like a drifting wreck." Such similes as these, borrowed from whatever is lifeless and helpless, flow from the pen of our historians whenever they speak of that period.

As a result of the extinction of their political leaders, all interest in national affairs, all patriotic pride and affection, were at that time unknown in Norway. The last Norwegian barons were Danish or Swedish in their proclivities, according to their personal connections and family alliances; none were for Norway. Even Knut Alfssön, so highly lauded as a patriot-martyr, was, through his relation-

<sup>1</sup> J. E. Sars, *Udsigt over den Norske Historie*, v. iii. pp. 212-218.!

ships and marriage, no more than a tool in the hands of Sweden. The only man who really uses patriotic language, and who seems to feel true indignation at the degradation of his country, is Vincent Lunge. In his letters we find many bitter utterances over the wretchedness of the country and the stultified spirit of the Norse folk. But this solitary patriot was—it is significant to note—not a Norwegian, but a Danish noble who had married into Norway ; moreover, his patriotism was in chief part no more than a becoming dress wherein to wrap his ambition, avarice, and love of power. The rescript<sup>1</sup> which he and the other state-councillors wrung in 1523 from Fredrick I. was no doubt more favourable to the country than that granted ten years earlier by King Christian II., but it was in practice no more than a sheet of parchment, which the king soon set aside. The national state-council still existed indeed, but it was a very feeble institution, incapable of the vital will to play an independent part. Danish magnates established themselves on the soil, bought up the finest districts, secured a title by marriage or other less creditable methods, and ruled or ran riot just as they chose. Law and justice were almost unknown ; family feuds and raids, lawless seizure of other men's possessions, pillage, and even petty wars between the more powerful chiefs, were the

<sup>1</sup> Known as a *Haandfæstning*, from the fact that for lack of a signet the wax-seal received the impression of the royal thumb.

order of the day. Never were such dark times in Norway as these, and, to adopt the old image of a night of four centuries, the beginning of the sixteenth century in Norway may be regarded as midnight.

It is the very atmosphere of this period which is so wonderfully brought before us in the dark drama which Ibsen unrolls under our eyes, with its paralysed powers and slanderous plotting, its waning hopes, and passions let loose, its ghostly suggestiveness and tomb-like horror.

No wonder that such a subject should have attracted Ibsen's love of the mysterious and the horrible; no wonder that he has succeeded in giving us a living picture of that period, and in boring for the first time into the depths of his own peculiar nature.

But the feeling which drew Ibsen to such a theme was not solely patriotic. The period of National revival in the first half of this century was less able, perhaps, than any other, to contemplate the age of the Reformation without a pang. The young and tender impulse of patriotism must have felt grief and regret at the thought of that degradation of the Fatherland; and Ibsen, too, must have felt them, as we may clearly discern from his having stamped them on Eline, the most beautiful figure in the drama. The real Eline did not feel so; nay, scarcely a woman in Norway in her time could have felt so; but to Ibsen she was the Muse of the piece,

since he has made her the representative image of mourning for the fate of the country. It was difficult in the beginning of the nineteenth century for any one to understand the Norwegians of that by-gone time; their abject state was incomprehensible, and every spark of high-mindedness or patriotism which could be discerned, or even imagined, was hailed with enthusiasm. Thus it came to pass that Knut Alfssön was set up as a National hero and a martyr for his country. A. Munch sang his praises in his "Pictures from North and South,"<sup>1</sup> other poets followed suit, and Ibsen opens his play with his name:—

"Who was Knut Alfssön?"

"Norway's last true knight."

There was in the air a craving to find something to be enthusiastic about, something great and magnanimous in the age so lacking in enthusiasm, grandeur, and dignity; and this craving gave Ibsen the motive for the conception of the heroine of his piece. About her he centres every hope for the resuscitation of Norway. He shows her standing by Knut Alfssön's bier, and swearing that her life shall be devoted to avenging the victim's death and winning freedom for Norway. From that moment every one, herself included, believes that she is elect to accomplish the deed which had dropped from Knut Alfssön's hands on board Henrik Krummedike's ship. All look to her for the watchword, which she never succeeds in giving them, because she finds

<sup>1</sup> *Billeder fra Nord og Syd.*

herself fettered in such a way that she dares not undertake the task. She has loved Sten Sture, and from her connection with him she has a son who is to be sent to Sweden. This son seals her fate. Every time she thinks she can step forth, her fears for her son hold her back. These fears drive her on to wed the feeble Nils Gyldenlöve, and to throw her daughters into the arms of Danish knights. Her love for this child robs her of the trust of her country-folk, draws her into difficult and suspicious situations, and at last leads her to murder her own son, in the belief that he is another who would stand in that son's way. She is a grandly conceived tragical figure, boldly worked out.

In real life, however, Fru (Lady or Dame) Inger was not so grandly planned a woman. She was the descendant of an old and noble family which had preserved its dignity, and she consequently was the wealthiest landowner in the country. This, and this alone, gives her a right to a place in history. If we study her life, we find no reason to suppose that patriotic considerations ever affected her conduct. The motive power of her deeds was of a far lower kind, and seems to have lain principally in an extraordinarily strong instinct for increasing her wealth and her status. We find her, for instance, on one occasion seizing the possessions of a neighbour, and retaining her hold till she is compelled to surrender them. When she gives her daughters in marriage to Danish noblemen, it



is because she promises herself some advantage from the alliance, these Danes being the most high-born sons-in-law she can meet with. When she takes a convent under her protection and renders it service, she contrives to be richly repaid as the land-owner. Even for a good action she exacts a return; when she affords a refuge to the persecuted Chancellor, she accepts from him a large gold ring, a hundred Rhine-gulden, and a large sum in rose-nobles and Hungarian gulden; and afterwards, when she undertakes to avenge the wrongs of the "Dale-junker," it is only because she has persuaded him to promise marriage to one of her daughters, in the hope that he will be made king of Sweden.

In all this, as in much else, she was no worse than her times, but, on the other hand, no better; and far from reproaching herself for having plighted her daughters to the foreign rulers of Norway, she was, on the contrary, on the best possible terms with her sons-in-law, and allowed herself to be guided on every occasion by the eldest and most important of them, Vincent Lunge, whom, after Nils Gyldenløve's death, she promoted to be head of the family. From such intractable materials did Ibsen's genius, under the patriotic impetus of his time, build up the noble, tragic figure which is now so familiar to his countrymen.

However, it was not until after the production of Ibsen's drama that so much light was thrown by



history on the person of "Inger Ottesdatter;" and although certain characteristic features were even then known, she was as yet an enigma which left ample room for guess-work in its elucidation. The way in which Ibsen accounts for her actions, by making the "Dalejunker" her illegitimate son by Sten Sture, is historically as daring as poetically it is a stroke of genius. It is well known that this was not the case. It is as certain that the "Dalejunker" was the son of a serf, as that Fru Inger and Vincent Lunge both believed in his claims, and attached themselves to him because there was just then a rumour abroad that Gustav Vasa was dead. But Ibsen was boldly independent of all facts, and what his drama lost in historical accuracy he has more than made up for in tragic power. It is the deep and desperate conflict in Inger's soul between maternal love and her love of her country which makes her the grand tragic figure that she is. It was by this poetical transmutation of history that Ibsen won a great poetical triumph.

Nor has he used less freedom in his treatment of the two characters which, next to Fru Inger herself, are the most important in the drama, Eline and Nils Lykke. The fact that Nils Lykke was the lover both of Eline and her sister Lucia is the only one to which the poet has been faithful; otherwise he has altered everything relating to them.

In 1528 the real Nils Lykke was married to Eline Gyldenløve, but she died at the end of four years,

leaving him two children. After some little time he fell in love with his sister-in-law, Lucia, but their union was strongly opposed by the family, because public opinion at that time regarded the marriage of a man with his sister-in-law as criminal. The entreaties alike of Nils Lykke and of Lucia were in vain, and when an illegitimate son was born to them, the hapless Nils was taken captive, sentenced, and murdered in prison in the year of our Lord 1535.

Ibsen either did not see the possible plot which lies in this love-story, or he did not choose to turn it to account. He antedates Lucia's love affair, so that Eline becomes Nils Lykke's second love; thus he has altered their relative position, making them stand to each other in the same relation as Furia and Catiline. Like Furia, Eline loves the man who has caused her sister's death, and hates Lucia's seducer without knowing that they are one and the same; and, like Catiline, Nils Lykke in Ibsen's play has been wild and reckless, not keeping any account of a love affair more or less. But here the resemblance ends. Nils Lykke's diplomatic craftiness is as unlike Catiline's blind ferocity and rage as Eline's self-sacrifice is the opposite of Furia's thirst for revenge. Only the essentials of the situation have been resuscitated by Ibsen to be the under-plot of his play, and not the characters of the persons concerned.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hence, when Brandes compares Catiline and Nils Lykke as Ibsen has depicted them, and says, "That nothing should be wanting to the

As may be seen, Ibsen has handled historical facts very freely throughout. He has thus condemned himself in the opinion of Hettner, who lays it down that historical tragedy must never tamper with history. The words in which Ibsen, in a postscript to *Catilina*, sets forth his attitude towards historical truth may be quoted and applied with double force to *Fru Inger til Oestraat*. In that postscript he says : "The historical element is utilised only as the outer clothing or vehicle of the ideas embodied in the drama." But he adds very justly, "For having made use of the names of historical personages, who, as they appear on the stage, differ in character and in other respects from the originals as known to history, the author hopes to be forgiven ; all the more, since these names are hardly so important as to introduce any disturbing element when we find them in circumstances for which there is no authority in history."

To Ibsen as a dramatist, in short, history was at this time no more to be reckoned with than reality had been to Ibsen as a lyric poet ; it was no more than a point of solid ground whence he set forth on a voyage in the world of his thoughts and fancies.

From the period of the Reformation Ibsen turned to the legendary age of the Sagas. "But the resemblance, the poet has borrowed the leading motive from *Catilina*," it seems to me that he goes too far. *Aesthetiske Studier*, p. 245. Vasenius too has uplifted his voice against this parallel of Catiline and Nils Lykke. *Ibsen's Dramatiske Digtning*, p. 127.

King's Sagas and the historical records generally of that remote period did not captivate me," he says in the preface to the second edition of *Gildet paa Solhaug* (The Feasting at Solhaug). "I could at that time make no capital of the struggles between kings and chiefs, between the king's adherents and the dependents of noble families; they were useless for my poetical purposes until a later date." Then he accidentally came across N. M. Petersen's *Historiske fortaellinger om Islaendernes faerd hjemme og ude* (Historical Tales of the Voyages of the Icelanders at Home and Abroad), and his study of this clever work, with a translation of a few of the old Icelandic family sagas, was an important event. "From these family chronicles," he writes further on in this preface, "with their changeful relations between man and man, between woman and woman, but above all between the different groups of human beings, there flashed upon me a more personal, full, and living sense of the largeness of life; out of my intercourse with all these strongly-individualised figures of men and women there shot into my brain the first rough, vague sketch for *Haermaendene paa Helgeland*" (The Warriors at Helgeland).

How, subsequently, the details grew up in his mind he no longer remembers; but the two female figures, Hjördis and Dagny, were to be prominent in it, "and a great feasting, with distinct and important scenes. But many circumstances intervened, chiefly of a personal kind, and these were

probably the most decisive. Still I am glad to believe that it was not without purpose that I turned my attention just then to Landstad's collection of *Norske Folkeviser* (Norwegian Popular Songs), which had appeared a few years before.<sup>1</sup> The frame of mind in which I was at the time was more easily attuned to the romances of the Middle Ages than to the strong action of the legendary tales, to the verse form than to prose style, to the musical language of the heroic ballads than to that which is characteristic of the Sagas."

From these words it is not difficult to discern what the moods were which stood between Ibsen and the Sagas, which exchanged Sigurd the Viking for Gudmund the Minstrel, Dagny, the faithful wife, for the young love-sick Signe, and the first sketch of the tragedy *Haermaendene paa Helgeland* for the lyrical romantic drama *Gildet paa Solhaug* (The Feasting at Solhaug—literally the Sunhills). But besides this, we have some poems by Ibsen at this date which throw light on this frame of mind. One, *Markblomster og Potteplanter* (Wild-flowers and Pot-plants), begins with these words:—

Your taste I cannot comprehend,  
Nor what afflicts your eyes !  
No beauty she, believe me, friend,  
Nor even over-wise.

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<sup>1</sup> These were written in the dialect of the peasants from whom M.B. Landstad had heard them.

And ends as follows :—

Good argument though reason yields,  
I care not how you scold ;  
She is a wild-flower of the fields,  
And sixteen summers old.

And the next poem in the collection, *En Fuglevise* (A Bird's Song), is pitched in the same key which dominates the utterances of Signe's and Gudmund's love :—

I painted poetic pictures  
In hues that sparkled and glistened ;  
Two brown eyes that were shining  
Laughed and listened.

It was beyond a doubt under the influence of these brown eyes that the "Feasting at Solhaug" was written. For this reason the piece is the freshest and happiest of Ibsen's works. Even here, indeed, threatening clouds darken the sky ; but they disperse without doing any mischief ; no serious discord arises, and the whole closes in a full major chord. Everything, and not merely the rhythmical style of the piece, is, to use Ibsen's words in the preface, "fanned by a light summer breeze."

"The Feasting at Solhaug" was a success. It was acted to a crowded house and received with vehement applause. At the end of the performance the author and actors were recalled again and again. "Later in the evening an orchestra, followed by a large crowd, played a serenade under my window.



I almost think that I allowed myself to be tempted into making a sort of speech to the assembly ; at any rate, I am sure I felt very happy."<sup>1</sup> The piece was not only performed six times running, a wonderful run for a theatre in so small a place as Bergen, but it was frequently repeated at intervals, and made Ibsen's name known for the first time to a wide circle, since it was produced not only at Christiania, but also at Copenhagen and Stockholm.

But in proportion as theatre-goers were favourable to the drama the critics were antagonistic. Ten years before this, Henrik Hertz, in his play *Svend Dyrings Hus*, had made use of the rhythm of the Danish heroic ballad ; and now, when Ibsen had in the same way borrowed the measure of the Norse popular ballad, every one was ready to accuse him of plagiarism from Hertz. At the first performance in Christiania certain newspaper critiques had endeavoured to point out parallel passages, and when the piece became known in Denmark it fared even worse. It was neither more nor less than "an attempt in every respect inferior to its model, *Svend Dyrings Hus* ;" "it was nothing else than a colourless imitation of the Hertizian drama ;" "it was a bad Norwegian copy of a fine Danish original," and so forth. That such a verdict was utterly superficial and misleading has been elaborately shown by Vasenius in his essay on the subject.<sup>2</sup> The Swedish

<sup>1</sup> Preface to second edition of *Gildet paa Solhaug*.

<sup>2</sup> *Henrik Ibsen's Dramatiska Diktning*, pp. 76-112.



critic dissects both pieces, points out incidentally various errors of dramatic construction in Hertz's work, and comes to the conclusion that the "Feasting at Solhaug" is, theatrically, a far better play than its supposed model—a conclusion against which no well-founded objection can be raised. But not satisfied with this, he compares the motives and personages of the two dramas, and easily demonstrates that they have no relationship whatever. Any one who brings acumen to bear on the question will at once perceive that any attempt to represent *Gildet paa Solhaug* as an imitation of *Svend Dyrings Hus* is impossible, save on condition of overlooking the leading motive and principal figures of Ibsen's work.

The story of Hertz's play turns on the unfortunate application by the Knight Stig of certain mystical runes, and the momentous results to Ragnhild. Subsidiary to this leading motive are three others: (1.) The cruelty of Guldborg to her step-children, whose mother cannot rest in her grave, but hovers, a despairing ghost, beholding all that befalls them; (2.) Stig's love for Regisse; and (3.) Tage Bolt's courtship of Ragnhild.

In Ibsen's piece we find no runes, nor any corresponding mysterious power. The love of Margit for Gudmund Alfssön has no supernatural element whatever. Its beginnings and growth are accounted for in the most natural way in the world. Nor are there in Ibsen's piece any personages answering to the cruel step-mother or the ghost. On the other

hand, there is, no doubt, a certain resemblance between the Knight Stig and Gudmund Alfssön in their relations to the two sisters. Stig and Gudmund alike are loved by both sisters and scorned one; but such a predicament is common in all literature, and too unimportant to be made the subject of a comparison. If a charge of plagiarism is to be based on such a resemblance as this, we shall be led to the wildest extremes. Finally, there is a likeness between Tage Bolt's part in the plot of the Danish piece and Knut Gjæsling's in the Norwegian play. Tage and Knut both court one of the sisters, and each fails in his suit—under very different circumstances, to be sure—from the fact that the sister in question loves, in one case Stig, and in the other, Gudmund Alfssön.

Each revenges himself by a night-attack on the homestead, and both are finally overpowered and taken captive. Even if it be admitted that Hertz's play did, in this particular, offer a suggestion to Ibsen, this minor action is really not enough to degrade his play to the level of a mere imitation; above all, when the leading motive is totally different.

The principal action in *Gildet paa Solhaug* has in fact no resemblance whatever to that of *Svend Dyrings Hus*; it is Margit's love for Gudmund. That this love has neither its origin nor its growth in any supernatural element has already been observed. Nor, on the other hand, is it an essential feature that it is love scorned, though this of itself

distinguishes it from Ragnhild's. Margit always believes that Gudmund would love her if she were free: her love is characterised as that of a married woman for a stranger. On this alone does the conflict, the *agonism* of the piece depend; and any endeavour to treat this as a plagiarism from *Svend Dyrings Hus* must necessarily fail, especially after Ibsen's delightful and satisfactory account of the origin of his piece in the preface to the second edition.

We have yet to consider the resemblance of form: the adoption of the rhythm of the heroic ballads. It is not improbable that Hertz's play may have suggested this to Ibsen. Ibsen, however, denies it in the preface so often quoted; and how little he himself can have been conscious, as he wrote the drama, of owing anything to Hertz in this or any other respect, is best proved by the fact that within two months of producing *Gildet paa Solhaug* he put *Svend Dyrings Hus* on the Bergen stage. Ibsen's piece was performed for the first time on the 2nd of January 1856; Hertz's followed on the 24th of February.

Ibsen asserts that his study of Landstad's *Folkviser* amply accounts for the form in which he casts his play; and if we read his little article written in the following year on the heroic ballad and its influence on poetry,<sup>1</sup> and see with what fervour he had at that time taken up this class of poem, and

<sup>1</sup> *Om kjaempevisen og dens betydning for Kunstpoesien*, in the newspaper *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, 1857, Nos. 19-20.

how important a part it was destined, in his opinion, to play in poetic art, this explanation seems highly plausible. "The day will come," Ibsen then wrote, "when our National poets will study ballad-writing as an inexhaustible gold-mine. Refined and restored to its primitive purity, and elevated by art, it will then strike root among the people." As a dramatic writer he preferred the ballad to the Saga. "The Saga," he writes, "is wholly and purely epic: in the heroic ballad the lyric element exists, under a different aspect, no doubt, to that which it wears in the drama; still it is there; and the dramatic poet who seeks his material in these ballads need not modify it to any such extent as that which he borrows from the Sagas. This is an important advantage, which enables the poet to adopt into his work far more intimately and accurately the reflection of the times and incidents he is depicting; he may thus, if otherwise capable, set his hero before the spectator exactly as he himself knows him from the narrative ballad. Added to this, the facile rhythm of the old ballad-verse allows of many liberties which are of immense advantage in the dialogue form of the drama; hence there can be no question that this poetic fount sooner or later will be extensively used by those future dramatists who continue to build on the foundations laid by Oehenschlæger. The national poetry of the North began with the Sagas; now it is the turn of the heroic ballad."

Ibsen's next play was again worked out in the

spirit and style of the heroic ballad—*Olaf Liljekrans*. In romantic feeling and tone it excels *Gildet paa Solhaug*, but in dramatic solidity and power it is not to be compared with it.

The plot of this three-act drama, never yet published, is as follows:—

Dame Kirsten Liljekrans and her neighbour Arne fra Guldvik have agreed to put an end to a long-standing feud between their families, and to seal the treaty of peace and reconciliation, Arne's daughter Ingeborg is betrothed to Olaf, Kirsten's son. Both the parents are very eager for the marriage. Arne, an ambitious peasant owner, is anxious to ally himself with so noble a family as that of Liljekrans. Dame Kirsten hopes to strengthen her failing fortunes by the help of the wealth of Guldvik. Shortly before the wedding, however, Olaf goes up into the highlands, and there, in one of the mountain gorges, he meets Alfild, a young girl who makes so deep an impression on him that he forgets his betrothed and everything else, and only wishes that she should come with him and become his wife. Alfild is a complete child of Nature. The dale in which she has grown up in company with her father, Thorgeir the fiddler, is deserted; no one else has lived there since the Black Death carried off all the other inhabitants, and she herself has never been out of it. She goes with Olaf in sheer glee at the new life she is to see; but no sooner have they come down to the *Bygd* (parish precincts), than Olaf remembers his former

pledges and, at his mother's advice, leaves Alfild to her fate. Beside herself with grief and despair, the girl sets fire to the house where the wedding is held, and flies back to her native valley, while the bride makes her escape with Hemming, a man in her father's service, whom she prefers to Olaf. Alfild is pursued by Dame Kirsten's henchmen, seized, and condemned to die on the spot. The sentence is to be executed forthwith, unless "a man of blameless repute will come forward to declare her innocence, and proclaim his willingness to marry her." At the last moment Olaf Liljekrans appears, and while bewailing his past weakness, he announces that he will release her and marry her. Dame Kirsten at last gives her consent, on learning that Alfild is the owner of a rich and uninhabited dale. Ingeborg and Hemming are also forgiven and blest by Arne.<sup>1</sup>

There is a well-known ballad of the same name as Ibsen's piece.<sup>2</sup> The hero is betrothed as in the play, and his marriage is soon to be celebrated. He is met by elves who try to tempt him away, but he resists their wiles and refuses to be intimidated by their threats. To punish him, they beat him so mercilessly that he dies soon after his return home. Some passages in the drama refer to this ballad; indeed, some words are actually borrowed from its verses. The first motive of Fru Kirsten

<sup>1</sup> A fuller account of this play is to be found in an article by H. Jæger on *Henrik Ibsen's Olaf Liljekrans* *Nyttidsskrift*, vol. vi. pp. 76-103.

<sup>2</sup> Landstad's *Norske Folkeviser*, p. 355.



is also probably derived from the old legend, for Olaf's mother plays a similar part to Dame Kirsten at the beginning of the piece; and finally, Olaf's dazed and bewitched condition in the first act must be regarded as suggested by the ballad. But here all resemblance ceases. In the development of the action and the characters they have nothing in common.

Nor, again, can it be the old ballad which sowed the seed of the drama, for it had begun to germinate and bud before the heroic ballad had gained its hold on the writer's mind, and this is why the progress of the action remained so little affected by it. The ballad gave the play its name and the figure of the hero; still, the hero is not on the whole the most important figure in the drama; this is Alfild, who was, in fact, the first-born of them all.

This young girl, whose home is a mountain valley where the inhabitants all perished when the great sickness visited the district, is indeed none other than *Justedalsrypa*,<sup>1</sup> as she is described in the Saga which gave Ibsen the first hint of his drama. So long ago as in the year when he had written *Catilina*, he had formed a project for putting the story of *Justedalsrypa* into form, and set to work on it at once; but he laid it aside when he had finished only the two first acts. The MS. of 1850 is still extant; it bears the title: *Rypen i*

<sup>1</sup> *Justedalsrypa*, literally the Ptarmigan of Justedal. This story of a maiden left alone in a valley to grow up utterly wild is given by A. Faye, *Norske Folkesagn*, 2nd edit., p. 129.



*Justedal*, "The Ptarmigan of Justedal, a National Drama in four acts." The heroine is the very same as Alfhild in *Olaf Liljekrans*, and even bears the same name; indeed, it would seem that the action was intended to be worked out on the same lines as in the finished play.

With *Olaf Liljekrans* Ibsen's apprentice years at Bergen came to an end; it was the last piece he wrote during his managership there. It marks the close, as *Sancthansnatten* marked the beginning, of a period, and there is a certain resemblance between the two pieces. A certain timidity, want of grip, and of logical sequence is discernible in both, due to the fact that they stand each at the turning-point of a stage of Ibsen's development. In *Sancthansnatten* we see the dawning influence of popular legendary romance, and in *Olaf Liljekrans* that influence is already on the wane. Just as *Sancthansnatten* was a forecast of his apprehension of the popular ballad, so an æsthetic essay followed immediately on *Olaf Liljekrans*. This was the above-mentioned article: *Om kjaempevisen, og dens bedytning for den Nationale Kunstpoesie* (The Heroic Ballad and its Influence on Poetical Art). We saw in the passage above quoted (ante, p. 90) what importance Ibsen ascribed to that influence; but he was less strong in practice than in theory. In *Olaf Liljekrans* we see the analytical solution of romanticism in full activity.

So far as the form is concerned, this process of

decrystallisation is obvious at the first glance. Verse and prose contend for the preference, and here we have not the lyrical passages alone written in verse, as in the "Feasting at Solhaug." Quite common-place passages occur in metrical form, while, on the other hand, very romantic love-scenes between the chief personages are to be spoken in prose. The absence of consistency in the psychological development is if possible even greater.

Both Olaf and Alfild are characterised by a singular variability of mood; at one moment they are highly romantic, at the next they are quite sane and practical. For instance, in the first act, Olaf speaks and thinks so that it is easy to believe that Alfild is a real elf who has bewitched him, and not an ordinary mortal; but no sooner is he down in the village once more, than his romantic mood has changed, and he yields to his mother's work-a-day, common-sense arguments.

It is the same with Alfild. After she has set fire to the house, a lofty tone of romance seems to carry her away; she speaks with "a strong and increasing expression of frenzy," as the stage-directions tell us; but as soon as she is a prisoner, and put on her trial in the presence of Fru Kirsten, her conduct is quiet, self-controlled, and normal. Similar sudden and unfounded changes frequently recur in the piece. Romance is no longer the inmost sentiment of the drama: it exists only in a series of superficial effects.

And if, finally, we examine the fundamental idea of the piece, again we find a decrystallisation. It is, in fact, the struggle of romance and reality. In Olaf these contending aspects of life exist as distinct antagonistic elements. Under Alfild's influence, he sees the romantic side of everything; under his mother's, he sees things as they are. Alfild is differently constituted; she is the very incarnation of the romantic; and the antagonism which in Olaf is a part of his being, to her is a merely external circumstance. She shows us the struggle of romanticism with hard reality, and the defeats she suffers in the strife are so many triumphs for reality. But Ibsen's heart still clings fondly to romance, and it is with bitter reluctance that he allows it to be the weaker.

*Olaf Liljekrans* was only twice performed. Ibsen himself was ill-satisfied with the piece; he never allowed it to be printed, and some years after he even attempted to work it up for a romantic opera. He completed the first act, and set it aside for a few years; then he began the second act, and sent a copy of the piece to Udbye, the composer, who was ready to write the music; but almost immediately on this the whole thing fell through.<sup>1</sup>

The fact of the matter was, that from the stage which Ibsen had reached when he wrote *Olaf Lilje-*

<sup>1</sup> The original MS. of 1859 is in private hands in Christiania. The copy forwarded to Udbye belongs to the Scientific Society of Trondhjem, with Ibsen's letter to Udbye dated July 18, 1861, and a report of what occurred between the poet and the musician.

*kraus* there was no way back to romance. Everything pointed forward to fresh fields and new prospects. One phase of development was closed ; another must now begin. The heroic ballad had nothing more to yield him ; it was now the turn of the Saga.

Meanwhile the five years for which he had bound himself to the theatre at Bergen had also come to an end. They had been five fruitful years of apprenticeship to the dramatic craft and an important period of his development. Romanticism had, so to speak, evolved a new ferment in his seething spirit. The apprenticeship and the process of fermentation were alike over ; he was now master of his own art, and his brain had settled and cleared, at any rate for a time.

But this rest and clearness were not to be of any long duration ; fresh antagonisms, fresh doubts, fresh fermentations were awaiting him in altered circumstances.

A new appointment, that of Director of the Norwegian theatre at Christiania, was open to him ; and the town which had been the scene of his first struggle for existence in his youth was, during the next seven years, to witness the striving of the man to secure a firm position as a poet. He left Bergen in the summer of 1857, and only returned for a short visit in the following year, to be married to the woman to whom, after years of life together, through joy and sorrow, he dedicated the beautiful lines called *Tak* (Thanks).

### CHAPTER III.

#### *THE BATTLE OF LIFE IN CHRISTIANIA (1858-1864).*

WHEN Ibsen settled again in Christiania, he brought with him the beginning of a new drama. The impressions and pictures which the study of Icelandic Sagas had left on his mind still occupied his fancy, and had already, before he left Bergen, assumed a dramatic and psychological form.

One thing only was at first not quite clear to him, namely, the style he should adopt for writing the legendary drama. In his article on the heroic ballad he dwells at some length on this question.

So much was evident, that he could certainly not adopt the form used by Oehlenschläger. "It will certainly be obvious at once," he writes, "that the iambic verse of five feet is by no means the best fitted for the treatment of the antique Scandinavian legends. It is foreign to the spirit of our rhythm, and national subjects can only be adequately treated in a national form."

Oehlenschläger, however, had experimented in another form, that of the Greek tragedy. Might not this be the best ?

"Although the actual writing of the Sagas was effected within the Christian era," Ibsen says in another part of the essay, "the poetry is essentially pagan; hence the material is more suitably treated in the antique Greek style than in what may be termed the Christian style. For this reason Oehlenschläger is certainly more successful in his *Balders Død* (The Death of Balder) than in his other dramatic works."

According to Botten-Hansen's biography, Ibsen began his *Haermaendene paa Helgeland*<sup>1</sup> (The Warriors at Helgeland) in verse form, and in that case he undoubtedly intended to carry it out on the Greek model. A Northern tragedy in the Greek style: this is probably how he formulated the problem. But he had not got on far before he began to have doubts. Even while writing his essay on the heroic ballad he had perceived that there was yet another possible form in which the problem might be solved. "*Haakon Jarl* in prose might, from Oehlenschläger's pen, have been not less poetical than in verse," he there wrote; and that by "prose" he meant the original style of the Sagas may be regarded as certain.

Only the year before, Björnson had written *Mellem Slagene* (Between the Fights), but it had not yet been printed or acted. In this little play we find the first attempt made to adapt the style of the Sagas to dramatic poetry; but Björnson, still young, and by nature a lyric poet, had not succeeded in fitting

<sup>1</sup> Helgeland is a tract of the coast of Norway north of Trondhjem.



himself to its severe brevity. Thus Ibsen was in truth the first to apply it to the drama, while Björnson simultaneously revived it in a narrative form in his *Synnöve Solbakken*. Thus the two poets met for the first time on common ground, each separately and independently reverting to the old Scandinavian abruptness and conciseness of expression, with a view to finding a form suited to his poetical aims. The way in which Ibsen solved the problem has been admired by contemporary and by more recent judges of art. There is here nothing superfluous, nothing unnecessary, no intrusion of the personal element, no lyric outbursts. The language glows with passion, but the fire never bursts into flames or sparks. We find sharp wit and biting retort, but the contest is never fought with light weapons. Rather do we feel as if we were looking on at a struggle for life or death between men armed with the short heavy swords of the ancient Vikings. Love and hate, friendship and revenge, scorn and anguish, they are all as concentrated and as vehement as in the Saga itself. The style could not have been more happily adapted to the matter, and as we read we are irresistibly reminded of Henrik Wergeland's description of the speech of the Dalesmen—

Like the clear axe in the woodland,  
Sonorous it sounds, and yet homely.

But it is not alone the style of the Sagas, but their



very spirit which we find living in this fine work. One critic after another has blamed the writer for having mangled the demi-gods of the Völsunga Saga by turning them into Vikings of the time of Erik Blodöxe, and having at the same time made use of other Sagas in order to collect effective scenes for his drama. The only critic, so far as I am aware, who has taken his part in this matter is Vasenius. In his opinion, Ibsen is perfectly justified in making simple Vikings of the heroes of the Völsunga Saga, and has borrowed nothing from any other myth.

Any one who will take the trouble to read all the Sagas which have any connection with the case in point will discern that neither of these views gives a truly accurate idea of the relation of the play to these sources. In the first place, *Haermaendene paa Helgeland* can by no means be so directly affiliated to the Völsunga Saga as its critics state. All that the dramatist has borrowed from it is a part of the prologue and a part of the skeleton of the story; but he has only adopted the groundwork of the Saga, neither its details nor its characters.

Like Sigurd Favnesbane (Dragon-slayer) Sigurd the Viking has done the deed exacted by Hjördis (Brynhild) from the man whom she will wed, and afterwards, like his hero namesake, has renounced her in favour of his half-brother Gunnar, and married another wife. This is told in a dialogue with Hjördis, who, in consequence of this revelation, brings about Sigurd's death and her own. It

is evident that the expressions which can apply equally to the Saga and the drama must be very general.

There is but one point of real resemblance. When Gudrun has betrayed the secret, there is a scene in which she strives to soothe Brynhild, and entreats her to think no more of it. In the next scene Sigurd explains everything to Brynhild, and then comes a scene in which Brynhild incites Gunnar to kill Sigurd. These three scenes have their counterpart in *Haermaendene*, but they occur in different order, and no part of them has been verbally transferred to the drama. That there is a real connection between the play and the Völsunga Saga is undeniable, but it is as loose as that of *Fru Inger* with real history. The corresponding scenes in *Haermaendene* cannot possibly be regarded as a paraphrase of similar portions of the Völsunga Saga; nay, the play cannot with any precision be spoken of even as an independent dramatic version of the legend. To be exact, we can only describe it as a dramatic work in which some leading features of the Saga have been appropriated in a very much altered form.

The same may be said of the relationship of the piece to other Sagas—as, for instance, Oernulf's death-lament to the passage in the Egil's Saga where the origin of the famous song *Sönnetabet* (the Loss of the Son) is set forth. Here Ibsen has really dramatised the myth; and similar details, though

not treated in exactly the same manner, are to be met with throughout the Sagas, which Ibsen knew through Petersen's translation. The magnificent scene of the feast in the second act shows many references to the Sagas. Oernulf's question as to how Thoralf fell, and his remark on it, have their parallel in Kveldulf's words on the death of his son Thorolf.<sup>1</sup> Hjördis's speech about the bowstring is borrowed from the famous words spoken by Halgerde at Gunnar of Hlidarende's last fight;<sup>2</sup> and finally, the tragical love-story of Kjartan and Gudrun in the *Laxdöla Saga* has several points of resemblance with the fate of Hjördis and Sigurd.

All these points may be regarded as trifles, and it may certainly be said that at any rate they do not disprove that Ibsen collected effective passages from various Sagas wherewith to grace his dramatised version of the *Völsunga Saga*. But now let us turn to the important point, the characters themselves. Can it be said of them with any truth that they are the demi-gods of the Sagas defaced by Ibsen's hand? What have Sigurd the Viking and Sigurd the Dragon-slayer in common? Their name, their courage, and their skill in battle. The name, which has no doubt misled many critics, Ibsen chose without prejudice, simply because it was a common Viking name; and as for courage and skill in the fight, they were

<sup>1</sup> Egil's Saga.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the passage with *Njal's Saga*.

common in quite as high a degree to the Vikings of Erik Blodöxe's time as to the half-mythical personages of the Volsung legend.

Ibsen would indeed have been a bungler if, supposing him to have intended to put Sigurd the Dragon-slayer on the stage, he had not represented him more faithfully. But this was not his intention. What he aimed at was the presentment of the typical Viking of the later Viking period, shortly before the introduction of Christianity, and this problem he has quite satisfactorily solved. Again, what points of identity do we discern between the characters of Gunnar of Hlidarende and Gunnar Gjokessön? One is as gentle and peaceable as the other is fierce and quarrelsome. But if, in fact, we were bent on finding a prototype for every single figure, we must seek it in the Njal's Saga, and not in Völsunga.

When Gunnar of Hlidarende has felled his foe at Rangaa he says, "I do not know whether I may be thought a man of less valour than other men because more than others I loathe to slay a man." In these words lie the key to his character. And it is not impossible that we find in this same Saga more clue to the character of Hjördis than in the Völsunga Saga. Hjördis is, no doubt, a Valkyrie by nature, as Brynhild is, but the other has much more in common with the wicked women of the family Sagas. Her conduct to the peasant Kaare, her defiant and her spiteful words at the

banquet, her thirst for revenge and cruelty, seem to ally her more closely to Gunnar's wife, but with this difference, that Ibsen has endeavoured to supply a motive for deeds which, in the Njal's Saga, appear motiveless and inhuman, and so makes them seem human. That Dagny at all resembles Gudrun in the Völsunga Saga no one will assert. In spite of Ibsen's own statement in the preface to *Gildet paa Solhaug* concerning the two female personages who lived in his mind while reading the Sagas, Dagny has no direct affinity with that literature; unless, indeed, Kjartan's wife Hrefna, in the Laxdöla Saga, may be regarded as a feeble shadow of Ibsen's creation.

Finally, we come to Oernulf: he is typical of the primitive, rough-hewn uncivilised Viking race. Egil Skallagrimson in his old age, and several other heroes of the Sagas, have no doubt sat as models for this figure. Oernulf, with his venerable strength, his obduracy, his insistence on his rights, and his love of money and possessions, is a typical individuality of the Viking age.

I have here proved, I believe, that any attempt to account for this play as a dramatic version of the Völsunga Saga comes to nothing under a comparison of the piece and the legend. To arrive at a satisfactory solution, we can only suppose that Ibsen, having assimilated a whole series of Sagas, worked them out independently to a complete unity, which reproduces the spirit of the

legends very admirably, though he rarely adopts the words of the family legends. In these race-myths, with their vehement actors and fierce scenes, he found exactly what he needed "as the human embodiment of the moods, the ideas, and conceptions which at that time ruled him, or at least floated before him, more or less distinct." The poet who in his first great tragedy had conceived of the "discrepancy between our desires and our power of fulfilling them, between wish and possibility," must have been singularly attracted by such homogeneous and sternly compacted individualities as those of Oernulf and Sigurd; and at the same time, the man who had begun his poetic career by sketching such a figure as that of Furia must have recognised in the wild and passionate woman in whose image he moulded Hjördis the creation of his own imagination. That first youthful attempt is bound by close affinity to the first ripe work of his manhood.

This Viking drama was as important, as marking an epoch in the evolution of Northern dramatic poetry, as Björnson's *Synnöve Solbakken* was in the domain of narrative. It was a far nearer approach to the Scandinavian antique than any dramatic work hitherto produced. Between Ewald's *Balders Död*<sup>1</sup> and Oehlenschläger's *Haakon Jarl* there is a great advance as regards the truthful conception and presentment of the old dwellers in the North; but from Oehlenschläger to Ibsen the

<sup>1</sup> Johannes Ewald, one of the greatest of Danish poets, 1743-1781.



stride is far greater. No wonder, indeed, that a generation accustomed to view Scandinavian anti-quity through Oehlenschläger's eyes found this play savage, and considered it a mistake to follow the lines of the Sagas so closely on the stage. "The wildness and ferocity which they describe," says J. L. Heiberg in his dicta on Ibsen's work, "are mitigated in the original epic form of document; but as soon as they are dramatised, nothing remains but the material in its native roughness. The author has apprehended the material with such objective vividness that it is almost offensive, since in a drama all that is hard must seem harder still than in an epic tale. A national theatre will hardly be the outcome of such experiments."<sup>1</sup> As a result of this verdict, the piece was rejected at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, and fared no better in Christiania.

At the Norwegian capital the fight over the nationalising of the theatre was at its height. The theatre at Christiania was, in fact, still Danish, and the artistic management was in the hands of a Dane, Borgaard by name. A large population of the residents, more especially the elder ones, accepted this as a matter of course. The Danish artists were much admired, and every attempt to create a Norwegian school of acting was regarded with distrust and contempt.

In opposition to this theatre and its patrons was

<sup>1</sup> *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vii. p. 40. Johan Ludvig Heiberg, the eminent Danish critic: 1791-1860.



a party, formed of all who maintained that the Norwegian stage must be Norwegian, if it was to fulfil its function as an element of culture for the people. A few of these men had, in 1852, established a sort of dramatic preparatory school, with a view to training Norwegian actors. This school ere long took form as a theatre—the Norwegian theatre—and between this and the older playhouse there was for about three years a vehement rivalry, which found an echo among the people as well as in the press. As stage-manager of the “Norwegian theatre,” Ibsen found himself in a leading position in this feud, and he rushed into the fray heart and soul.

The year before Ibsen's return to Christiania had witnessed a great battle over the nationality of the stage. Björnson, and the National party generally, insisted that the theatres of Christiania should no longer derive all their strength from Denmark; and when this demand was not complied with, a newly imported Danish actor was by common consent hissed off the stage. As a result of this demonstration several Norwegian actors were brought forward; but the Danish director continued to treat every Norwegian in a very step-dame fashion, and the complaint was especially loud that Norwegian literature was entirely set aside.

After this hissing there was a kind of truce, till, in the autumn of 1857, Henrik Ibsen offered his drama *Haermaendene paa Helgeland* to the old Christiania theatre. His own theatre, with its

younger and less experienced players, could not perform it. Borgaard at first promised that it should be produced that season; but at the end of six months the author was informed that "the pecuniary position" of the theatre during the present season did not allow of any outlay on original works. As, however, "the pecuniary position" of the house had, but a short time before, allowed of a not inconsiderable addition to the salaries of several Danish actors, and as, moreover, not a word was said of the possible production of the play next year, many persons regarded this as a rejection by the management of all national dramatic literature. Consequently on this, Ibsen made a violent attack on the management in a newspaper, *Aftenbladet*, and this gave rise to violent recriminations on both sides, in which Ibsen was coarsely reviled, while Björnson and Botten-Hansen entered the lists on his behalf. He had no alternative but to bring the play out in book form, and have it acted on his own stage. It was not till 1861 that the piece was adopted by the Christiania theatre (the older house), where it has since been frequently revived.

How strongly Ibsen at this time felt himself bound up with the Nationalist movement may be seen in his having conceived of founding an Association for contending against foreign influence and supporting native efforts in art. The ideal was discussed in the office of the *Aftenblad*, with two of

the editors, Richter (the late eminent statesman) and Björnson; and as a result, Ibsen and Björnson were invited to lay the foundation of such an Union. It was formed on the 22nd of November 1859, with the style of *Det Norske Selskab* (the Norwegian Society); Björnson was elected president, Ibsen vice-president.

One of the tasks announced by the union was a "crusade against the Dusseldorf school of painting." This was an error which withheld many persons from becoming members. What was intended, however, was no more than a defensive attitude against the encroaching influence of foreign as opposed to national art, and the chief point was the struggle against the Danish element in dramatic art in Norway. In this the Association was certainly one of the chief agents which led to the retirement, soon after, of Vilhelm Wiehe, the leading Danish actor at the old theatre. On this occasion the Danish party raised a perfect storm of lamentation, which found more or less immoderate vent in the papers. A. Munch, for instance, bewailed himself thus:—

Can it be possible that he is driven  
Hence by the shriek of "Norway for Norwegians!"  
By frantic shouts of patriotic Bersarks?  
When all the genuine public's on his side,  
And all who hold opinions worth possessing;

and H. O. Blöm, in a rhymed epistle to Wiehe, declared that the last day of the stage was at hand. This brought Ibsen into the field, with his bold and

witty "Letter to the poet H. O. Blöm."<sup>1</sup> In a few years the National party remained victorious. Most of the Danish actors had retired. Borgaard took his leave, and the old Christiania theatre was amalgamated with the National Theatre.

In other matters the Norwegian Society never played any important part. In 1860 it had formed a commission, of which Ibsen was a member, the object of which was to bring together the best Norse talent from the Bergen theatre and the two theatres in the capital, to give a series of high-class performances at Christiania. However, as the managers of the old Christiania house refused to lend their stage, the idea fell to the ground, and the Norwegian Society had not the honour of carrying it into execution. Subsequently to this a number of the members of the Storting joined the Society, which thenceforth assumed the aspect of a political union. Ibsen gradually withdrew into the background, and the Society presently ceased to exist.

Ibsen, however, joined another and less pug-nacious Union; this consisted of literary men and lovers of literature who gathered round Botten-Hansen. They met sometimes in their leader's well-lined library, sometimes in a little Swiss coffee-house—*L'Orsa's kafe*—where they had the use of a small private room. Although the times were rife in momentous political questions, men of the most antagonistic views assembled about the sym-

<sup>1</sup> Ibsen's *Digte*, p. 60.

pathetic person of their chief, A. O. Vinje, Ernst Sars, Christian Friele, L. L. Daae, and others, met as friends on neutral ground. Asbjørnsen's humour from time to time gave pleasant relief to their grave literary discourse; sometimes Welhaven would join the circle, and when he and Vinje began a keen and witty war of words there was no lack of life and laughter in the little party. Ibsen was a constant guest, and the greater part of the time he could spare from his work at the theatre he spent either at Botten-Hansen's or in the little back-parlour of the *Orsa's kafé*.

These years were not rich in literary work. He wrote several poems, of which *Terje Viken* and *Paa Vidderne* (On the Moors), both written in 1860, are the most important. The second gives the clearest evidence of the ferment he was going through, and that he was striving to work out something new in his verse, which had not yet assumed perfect clearness and consistency.

It need hardly be said that his head, meanwhile, was full of plans for new departures in dramatic work. By the summer of 1858 he had begun making studies for *Kongsemnerne* (Rivals for the Throne); but this was set aside for the time, and a new scheme gradually absorbed his attention. He took the materials for this new drama, not from the past, but from the present; it was not to be a historical tragedy, but a comedy of our own time. The satirist in him had waxed strong; the plot of *Kacr-*

*lighedens Komedie* (The Comedy of Love) cast the new historical tragedy into the background.

But the execution of this work was hindered by difficulties of form. A modern comedy must necessarily be written in prose, and the personages must speak like educated men and women of the day. The plot was sketched and the writing begun, but the further he went the less was he satisfied. He had been so long accustomed to the Saga style, and the expression and phraseology of mediæval romance, that at first he found it neither easy nor natural to hit the tone of ordinary conversation. It was stiffer than it should have been; and Ibsen felt that the dialogue made an ineffective impression. So he gave up prose and began the piece, with more or less freedom, in the familiar rhymed iambs, which, as it stands, have been admired with justice for their vivacity and wit. It was not till he wrote *De Unges Forbund* that Ibsen succeeded in infusing these qualities into modern colloquial prose.

The action of the "Comedy of Love" takes place in a country-house near Christiania, and its personages are ordinary men and women of the day—students, and a lawyer, and a wholesale dealer; indeed, the author had the audacity, till then undreamed of in Norway, to bring a reverend personage on the stage, and make him absurd in the form of Pastor Straamand. As a satire on society it is a bold piece of work, full of fresh wit and original hits.

"There is something in the 'Comedy of Love'



which suggests Camilla Collett's tale *Amtmandens Døtre* ('The Official's Daughters),' says Brandes in his essay on Ibsen.<sup>1</sup> Common to both, no doubt, are the attacks on betrothal and marriage, but the incidents giving rise to these attacks are widely dissimilar. Camilla Collett's novel is directed against the *mariage de convenance*. No marriage can be happy if it is not based on mutual affection. The feelings of the woman more especially must be taken much more into account than has hitherto been the practice; and on these two points, it may be said, the whole book turns.

Ibsen, on the contrary, makes no attack on such marriages. Indeed, he puts words strongly upholding them into the mouth of one of the most prominent persons in the play, the merchant Guldstad; and the significance he himself ascribed to this defence may be inferred from its influence on the *dénouement*; for it is, in fact, Guldstad's advocacy of a "marriage of reason," as compared with a love-match, which induces Falk and Svanhild to part. The whole piece, from beginning to end, is a satire on marriage for love only. It is just this, and the way in which love breaks down in such unions, which is the subject-matter of the plot. At the very moment when love first appears on the scene it receives the sentence of death. First come the aunts and friends and "destroy the poetry of love" with their intrusive interest in the betrothed couple; and then comes

<sup>1</sup> *Det moderne Gjennembruds Mand*, p. 125.



marriage, with its struggle for social advantages, and the care of children. What begins as a festival, ends, as a rule, in vulgar commonplace; and instead of being uplifted by their life together, most couples are dragged down to mere stolid and brainless habit:—

Use your experience; look around in life,—  
 Each pair of lovers takes for creed and psalter  
 That millions came to them as man and wife.  
 They gallop harum-scarum to the altar;  
 They make a home, spoiled pets of happiness;  
 A space goes by in faith-intoxication;  
 At length a day of reckoning dawns! ah! yes!  
 And proves mere bankruptcy their jubilation.  
 Bankrupt the flower of youth on matron's cheek;  
 Bankrupt the bloom of thought within her mind;  
 Bankrupt the husband's courage; tame and meek  
 Each flame that once flew blazing on the wind;  
 Bankrupt the whole condition of affairs,  
 Yet still they're quoted, on the Bourse of pairs,  
 A first-class firm of love, the best you'll find.

This is how Straamand<sup>1</sup> and his Maren, Styver and Miss Skjære, have fared, and so it is with Lind<sup>2</sup> and Anna. All these three couples have plighted themselves "for love," but their love is not strong enough to hold out:—

Of all the flame scarcely the smoke is left!  
*Sic transit gloria amoris*, Svanhild.

It is with love, in short, as it is with religion: it loses its fervour as soon as it is made public. The

<sup>1</sup> Most of the names in this comedy have a literal meaning in Norwegian; thus *falk* is a hawk, *skjære* a magpie, *styver* a worn-out copper coin; while *lind* is mild or meek, and *straamand* a man of straw.

human beings of our day are too petty-minded to love; and the tragical part of the business is, that they still live on in the belief that they do love. In contrast to all this torpor stand Falk and Svanhild. They see and know it, and it revolts them. But even they are too completely the children of their time to believe in the triumph of their own love over the dead level of commonplace everyday life. They feel, as Svanhild says—

From this hour  
Our triumph creeps disconsolate downhill !  
And we, when once the day of reckoning dawns,  
And we must stand before our mighty Judge,  
And He, a righteous God, bids us return  
The treasure that He lent us in life's garden,  
Falk, we shall find no answer then but this,  
“Lord, we have lost it on our road to death.”

No; if their love is to live and preserve its elevating power, it must become a memory; it must be emancipated from the forms of everyday existence, and be transmuted into a pure spiritual treasure in their souls. Falk and Svanhild arrive, on this point, at the same issue which Henrik Ibsen had given expression to three years earlier in his youthful poems; and Falk, like Ibsen, insists on the purifying power of memory in love when he exclaims:—

As 'tis the grave that heralds dawning life,  
So love to life can only wedded be,  
When, loosed from longing and desires' vain strife,  
It wins the spirit-home of memory.

It is in strict harmony with his peculiar conception of love that the author should sever his two principal personages just as they have learnt to love each other. This termination of the piece, which to the ordinary judgment must always seem painful, to Ibsen appears the only beautiful and poetical *dénouement* possible. All that is startling in the "Comedy of Love" is the direct outcome of the strangely marked idealistic nature of the poet. For the sake of the ideal he tests and rejects the insufficiencies of life; for the sake of love he lashes wooing. That he was not blind to the beauty of domestic life is abundantly evident from the words he attributes to Straamand and to Styver in the third act; but his sternly logical feelings and thoughts allow of no half-measures. His eye is so accustomed to the pure light of the ideal that it cannot be satisfied with the refracted rays of the real. The comedy was finished in the summer of 1862, and appeared in the following winter as the New Year's extra-number for the subscribers to *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*.

Already in the following year Ibsen had completed a new dramatic work—that previously mentioned as *Kongsemnerne*. When he began the work, in the summer of 1863, he was hampered by no doubt or hesitancy. The great work was carried through with one effort, and the subject took form so quickly and easily that the whole thing was finished in six weeks. This statement, already made by a

former biographer, seems incredible; but it is nevertheless accurate. Ibsen himself told me that it was so.

*Kongsemnerne* (Rivals for the Throne) displays considerable differences of structure as compared with its immediate forerunners. In these the action was brought into as short a period as possible. Unity of time was observed, and the action was carried out with the least available change of scene, so that unity of place was almost secured. In "Rivals for the Throne" Ibsen has observed a much less strict rule; for, from the beginning till the close of the piece, some years must have elapsed, and there are various changes of scene—on an average two in each act. But although on such points he has allowed himself greater freedom than usual, he has, on the other hand, been able to adhere more strictly to historical accuracy. We are shown the most important events of the time of which it treats, and the main features of the leading characters are also recognisable, though Ibsen has laid the hand of genius on the facts of history.

Ernst Sars, when defining the difference between the adherents of Haakon and of Skule, makes use of expressions which apply without much alteration to the two parties in the drama. "We everywhere," says he, "find the same strength and assurance in one party, and the same weakness, the same lack of confidence, in the other." The old *Birkebejner*

(birch-legs<sup>1</sup>) come forward simply as men whose conviction of the righteousness of their cause is no less immovable than their confidence in victory at last. Skule's adherents, on the other hand, put their trust in cunning and intrigue, and try by these means to place impediments in the way of their opponents' enthusiasm. They dare not boldly declare their aim, and that aim is, indeed, decidedly opposed to the general will; so that their proceedings are marked by indecision and ambiguity.

The cause of this contrast is to be found in history. Haakon represented the permanence of Sverre's dynasty; "he was brought up in the firm conviction of his right to become king of the land. He grew up among the old warriors of Sverre's day, who were imbued with his principles; and from them Haakon had received those principles, in the form of a complete system, whose realisation could only be a matter of time. Thus he stood from the first in a clear and intelligible position which set its stamp on his whole character. What, above all, gave him strength was the ease of mind, the equanimity, for which he was remarkable, and which had their root in the feeling he never for a moment lost, that he had right on his side, and the suffrages of his people." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The King's men. So called by reason of the shoes made of birch-bark which they wore in their first extreme poverty.

<sup>2</sup> Sars: *Udsigt over den norske historie*, p. 198.

With Skule it was far otherwise. He represented the antagonism of the nobles and the clergy in opposition to the new kingship. But the struggle was in truth over. The King's party had won the day, and Skule's attempt to revive the contest was but a last convulsive writhing of the conquered foe.

"Still, the noble and priestly faction, which was led by Skule, collected a circle of adherents; but after so many reverses they must have been fewer and less trusting." This was proved when Skule stirred up an open rebellion against Haakon. Notwithstanding that for a time fortune seemed to favour him, "it was evident from the first that this attempt to revive an opposition to the throne in Norway was like the desperate hazard of a gambler who does not calculate his chances of loss, but blindly risks his all in the hope of a stroke of good luck. The clerical party no longer held together, and Skule's friends dared not rally round him. He still had some adherents among the nobles; but the time was past when the nobles could form a party such as that of Count Erling Skakke, who, in 1164, had succeeded in getting his son crowned as Magnus V. He could not build even on the ancient race-feud between the natives of Trondhjem and the dwellers on the Vik or bay of Christiania. This hostility had of old been an ever-flowing source of civil warfare, but it seemed now to have dried up. Nor had Skule's proceed-

ings any support in public feeling or prevailing interest; a single defeat was enough to bring about his overthrow."<sup>1</sup>

As may be seen, so far as the relation of Haakon and Skule are concerned, the historian and the poet are fully agreed. In psychological treatment, however, Ibsen gives both the leaders far more depth and importance than history would lead us to ascribe to them. Haakon does not seem to have been a man of conspicuous talent; and though Ibsen nevertheless makes him such an one, and puts right royal ideas into his mouth, he does so, beyond a doubt, because he felt particularly attracted to the man of his creation.

Excepting only in "Saint John's Eve," "The Feasting at Solhaug," and *Olaf Liljekrans*, the inward *call* of his leading characters had hitherto always played an important part in Ibsen's pieces. Cati-line had a "call" to save Rome; Fru Inger to redeem Norway; Hjördis to become a Valkyrie; and Falk to be a poet. To Ibsen, at that time, such a vocation was surrounded by a halo of mystic poetry, and for this reason a figure such as Haakon, whose belief in his own right and whose confidence in his own strength were so unmistakable, must have appeared to him under a poetic glamour. Ernst Sars opines that "Haakon cannot be compared for greatness and poetic dignity to the most illustrious of his predecessors."

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Sars, the historian of Norway, in his *Udsigt*.



Ibsen is of a different opinion. The mere coincidence of the task before him with the position in which he is placed, to Ibsen constitutes his greatness; for it is that which is mystical, which is unfathomable; that is the grand secret of his inward call; it is his covenant with the "Power above" who smooths the way for the elect ruler, and leads him safely and almost unawares to the goal, as though walking in his sleep.

In contrast to this mystical and Aladdin-like confidence, we have the man of doubts and hesitations, who is never sure of himself; who can never decide on one course because he always has another in his eye which he might equally well choose; who is God's step-child on earth, because the spark from heaven, which Bishop Nikolas calls the *Ingenium*, never shines in him. He is highly gifted, noble, and magnanimous. He lacks nothing but that one thing which makes the other's greatness; and in exchange for it he has the torturing gift of doubt. In his picture of this character Ibsen has gone higher and deeper than in any previous work; nay, more: it is one of the most subtle and finely-wrought figures of all the Ibsen gallery.

With fine insight Georg Brandes has quoted one little dialogue between Skule and the Skald Jatgeir as throwing light on Ibsen's attitude towards his hero:—

*King Skule.*

What gift do I require to be a king?

*Fatgeir.*

Not the gift of doubt; for then thou wouldst not ask such questions.

*King Skule.*

What gift do I require?

*Fatgeir.*

Sire, thou *art* a king.

*King Skule.*

Art thou so certain, all the time, that thou art a *poet*?"

The last reply might well serve as a motto for the whole piece. "How much there is in this reply!" says Brandes. "What a bitter confession lies in this line!"

Nothing can be more certain than that Ibsen, when in this drama he became the poet of doubt—of self-doubt, had himself felt the gnawing of that serpent in the depths of his heart. Even in his earliest poems it finds some expression, and we have reason to suspect it at a later time under his hesitation over the production of some of his plays. To what a pitch he was tormented by doubt of his own poetic gift is to be seen in a cycle of poems which was published in *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*, 1859, under the title *I Billedgalleriet* (In the Picture-Gallery). The editor notes "that these poems belong to an earlier period of his life and work;" they were probably written towards the close of his residence in Bergen. The origin of the poems was an impression from

the Dresden Gallery, of a young girl copying Murillo's Madonna. The same reminiscences occur many years later in a little poem included in his collected works under the title *I Galleriet* (In the Gallery). He puts a series of songs into the mouth of this young girl; she bewails her ruined dreams of art; and to these he adds a series of sonnets in which he expresses his sympathy with her plaint:—

I, like this artist in her hall of pictures,  
Have known wild hopes and fair enthusiasms,  
Have spread abroad for flight my poet's pinions,  
And thought to soar far up thro' heaven's clear portals.  
Alas! I too know what is meant by failure;  
In that last stroke my poor wing sank exhausted.  
Read through and closed is springtide's book of fables,  
I now have time to ponder on its moral.

But of what avail is it, after all, to complain of his impotence?—

What in the world can be more ludicrous  
Than elegies to mourn one's lyric wants,  
Or still-born poesy, in whimperings  
Because the heart's rich only in grief and darkness?

A hideous black elf haunts him in evil hours and whispers words of distrust and doubt into his ear:—

And when, however quietly, it whispers,  
I feel as though a passing-bell had tolled,  
Or else as though a grave-cold lip had kissed me.

But all the same he is no longer afraid when the demon comes; he is no longer so simple; he knows the connection of it all: the black elf cherishes

the last blossom which remains, uncultured and neglected, of his spring-time :—

The blossom is the agonising thought  
That swings the mind from hope to hesitation,  
And stirs both doubt and faith in its vocation ;  
It winds itself about my barren soul,  
As lovingly as shoots, spring-sap has brought  
From Southern vines, cling round a rootless pole.

So great has Ibsen's distrust of himself been, that he has felt driven to use words of this harsh and vehement character ; so crushed has he been, at such times of ebb in his courage to live, and in his poet's faith, that he has found no adequate form for his mood but in such fractious and desperate words. As we read this poem we begin to understand what lies at the root of the wonderful understanding and subtlety with which Skule's ever-doubting nature is delineated.

However, by the time when *Kongsemnerne* was written this mental struggle was a thing of the past. Like the young poet in the "Comedy of Love," Ibsen had this in common with the hawk, that he needed a contrary wind if he was to reach a height. His was one of those natures which opposition does not quell but uplifts. And he met with plenty of opposition. As bitter quinine gives strength to the nerves, so was his self-confidence confirmed by the bitterness to which the circumstances in which he lived gradually gave rise.

Much may be said to the credit of the Norwegian

capital; but no one could ever think of calling it a city in which art and literature prosper. From a small town of about 10,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the century, it has grown with almost American rapidity, and has a population now of more than 100,000; nay, fast progressing towards 200,000. It may be said with truth of Christiania that it has "shot up," and the age of "shooting up" is, as we all know, not remarkable for amenity. Christiania is a town of colonists, with some pretensions to be regarded as a centre of culture. It has, indeed, progressed so far that it demands to be regarded as a piece of Europe, though, at the same time, its proportions are so narrow that it scarcely affords elbow-room; men jostle each other, push, tread on each other's toes, because there is not room for any one to get along. Scandal and calumny thrive to an incredible degree. If one of the inhabitants of the poultry-yard sheds a feather, at once, by the help of friends and acquaintances, it becomes five hens. And in proportion as men are ready for back-biting so are they unready to recognise merit. In larger communities, where there is more room, there is also more kindliness, and the recognition of one man's merits does not exclude that of another's. Here, on the contrary, a narrow-heartedness prevails, based, as it would seem, on the old proverb that "two fat pigs cannot ride in one sack." When one man has succeeded in coming to the front it is always at the cost of the others. And here,

where judgment is most severe, independence is most lacking. Every one waits for the word from outside. The author nowadays who would fain conquer Christiania must first take Copenhagen by storm.

Such a state of things must, of course, fetter all artistic and literary creativeness. It is annoying and stultifying to many men to meet with such universal indifference and want of sympathy; they lose all power of will, all courage, and say good-bye to everything. Others are embittered, and give vent to their bitterness. If a collection could be made of all the outbursts against Christiania from the various literature of this century it would be a choice posy indeed.

No Norwegian poet has had a word of praise for Christiania; the only exception that could be named is Wergeland; but he, significantly enough, confined himself to expressing his satisfaction at the growth of the city; and at a later period he also knew it only too well, he also lost heart, and bitterly bewailed having been born in Norway;<sup>1</sup> nay, he seriously thought of seeking some foreign scene for his life and labours. And Welhaven, though he met with far other treatment, has recorded no flattering witness against the capital, in his cycle of satiric sonnets called *Norges Daemring* (The Twilight of Norway) 1834. In *Soirée Billeder* (Evening Pictures) he worked out the idea in a more complete

<sup>1</sup> See Gosse: *Northern Studies*; chap. i. for particulars regarding Wergeland, Welhaven, and the literary life of Christiania in the thirties.



form, and if we would know what his feelings then were we have only to read *Det Tordnede True* (Coming Thunder).

Camilla Collett has contributed so many flowers to this posy that they would fill several pages of quotations. "Oh great and little city!" we read in *Amtmandens Dötre*, to quote only a few lines of a single eloquent passage, "what a cold and peevish sky is that which broods over you! You are great enough with your thousand beaks, yes, great enough to peck those to death slowly whom you no longer need, or to whom you owe a grudge. And yet not great enough for so hapless a wretch to find a corner in which he may hide himself. You are mighty; you have all the passions and fierce cravings and pretensions of a great city; and yet you are so small, so poor, that you cannot gratify one of all those desires."

Björnson sings to the same tune in the closing words of the first edition of his *Digte og Viser* (Poems and Songs); he describes the combat of a tiger and a horse on a Spanish arena, while the spectators shout, and try to madden the tiger when the horse has shaken himself free. It is highly significant evidence that none of our living Norwegian poets choose to live in the capital. They have arranged to reside in the country, as Björnson has done for many years; or, like Kjelland, they have buried themselves in a really small town. As a rule they have chosen a longer or shorter term of voluntary



exile. The most important Norwegian works produced in these later years have been written in Paris, Rome, or Munich, and not in Christiania.

Ibsen himself, during those years when he was a director of the Norwegian theatre, learnt to know better than most men the cruelty of the tender mercies of Christiania. No one seems to have suspected that he was a great writer, not even after *Haermaendene* and *Kaerlighedens Komedie* had given proof of it. The former was at first but coolly received. Björnson's novel of *Synnöve*, which was published first, had secured for its author a sort of patent, in public opinion, as restorer of the Saga-style. Ibsen was cast into the shade; indeed, in the discussion which arose on the rejection of his piece, the newspapers published many discourteous comments from anonymous correspondents. Not merely was he accused of being "dishonourable" and "boundlessly conceited," but it was assumed that his play—which was not yet finished—was, to judge by his previous efforts, probably but a poor affair; and such expressions as a "Norwegian weed" and "Norwegian plunder" were applied to it. "Henrik Ibsen, as a dramatic author, is of the highest insignificance: the nation cannot with any warmth plant a sheltering hedge about him," wrote one critic; and of the *Fru Inger paa Östraat* the same writer said that "it was a piece so utterly devoid of all idealism and poetry as to be positively

amazing. Every character in the piece bore the stamp of meanness."<sup>1</sup>

When the "Comedy of Love" was played matters were even worse. In *Morgenbladet* it was said that the notion of love which animated the drama was essentially provincial; "it might be expected of country cousins or aunts, but ought never to enter the mind of a poet." The fundamental theory of the piece "was not only intrinsically untrue and immoral; it was unpoetical, as every theory of life must be which represents the ideal and the real as irreconcilable." And this was as nothing compared with the verdict pronounced by the *Aftenblad*. Although Ibsen had been at work no less than three years at this piece, it was spoken of as a "lamentable outcome of literary trifling." "It ends in a recommendation to celibacy, whence it is very evident that Mr. Ibsen must have really had some Catholic notion in his brain when he wrote the 'Comedy of Love.'" "As a dramatic whole it is an absurdity," and the author was a "writer of no mark." "Ibsen has nothing of what is known as genius; he is clever, and his talent is principally technical and artistic."<sup>2</sup>

Among the general public the book raised a "storm of indignation more violent and more universal than most books can boast of stirring up,

<sup>1</sup> *Kristianiaposten*, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> *Morgenbladet*, March 15, 1863; *Aftenbladet*, February 14, 1863, in one of a series of papers on literary matters.

in a country where literary events are, as a rule, regarded by most of its inhabitants as no concern of theirs."<sup>1</sup> Nay, antagonism was so strong, that when, some time after, Ibsen craved a State bounty for travelling-money, one of the professors at the University declared that "the man who had written the 'Comedy of Love' deserved a thrashing rather than a travelling allowance."

As manager of the theatre, too, Ibsen had more than his share of unpleasantness. Actresses who fancied themselves neglected attacked him in the papers, and his position was so ill-founded that he had to submit to insult about every beginner, if he or his admirers fancied that he was left in the background. Then the accent of the performers was a source of vexation. Some thought that it was too strongly Norwegian; others that it was not Norwegian enough; and others complained because a French Countess was not made to speak broad Norwegian.

Thus at every turn vexations awaited him, and Ibsen must have been all the more worried because the New House laboured under great pecuniary difficulties. The town was not large enough to keep two theatres going while they struggled for the mastery; in time there was no more than a pittance for each. In the summer of 1862 the Norwegian theatre was bankrupt, and Ibsen consequently was left high and dry. His sole fixed income was 1200 kroner (about £67 : \$335), which

<sup>1</sup> Ibsen's words in the preface to the second edition of the play.

he had been receiving since the beginning of 1863 as *aesthetisk konsulent* (artistic adviser) to the Old Theatre. For this salary he was not merely a literary adviser, but was required to see to the historical accuracy of the costume and stage mounting when called upon to do so.

As Björnson had in 1863 been granted a poet's pension, Ibsen hoped to obtain a similar allowance from the Government; but his application was rejected. The only official help he had was certain small sums paid to him for seeking out and collecting old Norse poems and ballads.

Thus he was practically compelled to live by his pen; but that is a calling by which, as matters stand, a man will not grow rich in Norway, especially a man who, like Ibsen, has neither taste nor talent for journalism.

The prices paid him by publishers were so small as to seem almost incredible. For the "Comedy of Love" he received no more than 100 sp. thaler (132 American dollars), and that was considered a very good price at the time. For *Fru Inger* and *Haermaendene* he did not get nearly so much, and when the Old Christiania Theatre at last agreed to take the Viking play, the management put him off with a mere trifle, declaring that, as the piece was published, the theatre might have performed it without paying him a shilling for it.

To a writer like Ibsen, whose severe self-judgment rejected every piece of work begun if it did not

quite satisfy him, authorship under such conditions was a process of slow starvation. Indeed, he was in such necessity, that several of his friends, in consequence of an article in the *Norsk Folkeblad* of 1869, seriously exerted their influence to procure him—a place in the Customs or some such means of livelihood! A tempting prospect for the author of *Haermaendene* and *Kaerlighedens Komedie*, to stand over the weighing-platform and calculate the deductions for sugar-barrels and coffee-bags!

On the top of his personal difficulties came the last Danish-German war. Ibsen had not lost his Scandinavian enthusiasm of 1848, and the issues of the present contest filled him with distress and anxiety. With his fervid poetic temperament, he could not understand, and much less share, the hesitancy which withheld the Norwegian Parliament from coming to the support of Denmark. But worse still, in his eyes, was the fact that the student youth of the nation were content to sit still, though they had sworn in their private assemblies—sworn with uplifted champagne-glasses to witness—to sacrifice life and limb for the cause of Denmark:—

Those generous words that seemed to rush  
 From bold hearts swelling high,—  
 Were but a flood of empty gush,  
 And now their stream is dry!  
 The tree, that buds of promise bore  
 Beneath the banquet's light,  
 Stands stripped and smitten to its core,

A graveyard cross upon the shore  
That's ravaged in a night.

'Twas but a lie in festal song,  
A kiss that Judas gave,  
When Norway's sons sang loud and long  
Beside the Danish wave.

All this meanness and cowardliness burnt into his soul; they made his views of human nature more gloomy than before, and filled him with scorn for the nation he belonged to. He had already begun to conceive but a poor opinion of it. In the "Comedy of Love" he had attacked its crude views in the matter of sentiment and feeling; and in the historical drama, "Rivals for the Throne," he had found opportunity for an attack on the pettiness and instability of his fellow-countrymen, from which we see that his indignation was rising. We may remind the reader of the famous lines spoken by Bishop Nikolas when he appears to King Skule before he dies as a crusader, in the fifth act:—

So to their business the Norsemen go,  
Aimlessly wavering, to and fro,  
Their hearts like bladders, their heads like pillows,  
Weak in the wind as an army of willows;  
Only in one point on earth united,  
That everything noble has got to be spited,  
Waving the pennon of meanness of spirit,  
They harass the forces of honour and merit.

The ghost-scene in which these lines occur does not, indeed, strictly belong to the action of the piece,



and from the dramatic point of view the mistake is so conspicuous that, in a dramatist of Henrik Ibsen's qualities, it can only be regarded as a vagary of the pen. The fact was simply, that his wrath was by this time so hot within him that he could no longer refrain himself. He had to speak, even if to do so he must burst the very ribs of so well-constructed a dramatic organism as *Kongsemnerne*.

And if these had been his feelings in 1863, what effect must not the events of the following winter have produced on him? What was anything he had hitherto witnessed or experienced in comparison with what he saw and felt during the war? "The bitter tonic" which was to give him strength to start on a new path was brewing. He had had enough of Norway and the Norwegians. He must find peace and independence to enable him to filter and utilise all the new ideas and views of life which were fermenting within him. He must escape from the crushing conditions of his life in Christiania, must get away from this narrow circle, must find an opportunity of looking at it all from outside, and from a higher point of view. Here, at home, he must inevitably be ruined as a writer—that he plainly saw; he felt as though he were standing "on the edge of his grave," as he afterwards expressed it in a poem on the millennial festival of the Unity of Norway. And that grave was Christiania, "in the Great Graveyard," as he called Norway:—



Come out of this cleft so close !  
It breathes the air of the pit :  
No dew from the grass of it  
Is shed when the fresh wind blows.

In obedience to this impulse he took a step on which his whole life turned ; he addressed a petition to the State for a travelling allowance, and when it was actually granted he hailed it as salvation.

But even this last transaction in his native land was not untainted by characteristic unpleasantness. The University, through whom the petition was to be granted, would not lag behind the town in such an important detail. In fact, it was on this occasion that the speech was made about the thrashing ; and, to crown all, it was proposed that Ibsen should be allowed only half the sum he had applied for. The pension was so very small that neither fish nor fowl, as the Norwegians say, could have managed to live on it. Ibsen was consequently compelled to go to Councillor Ritterwold, the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, and lay the whole matter before him, and the result was, that the State-Council granted the whole sum named in the petition.

On April 2nd, 1864, Ibsen could shake the dust of Christiania from off his feet. May found him in Berlin ; from thence he went to Trieste, and on to Rome.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *ATTACKS ON NORWAY (1864-1869).*

THE impression made on a Northern who sees Italy or the Mediterranean for the first time is always wonderfully striking; especially when, like Ibsen, he takes the route by Trieste. Southern Austria is traversed in the darkness of evening and night; the traveller awakes before sunrise and looks out of the carriage-window. Anything more desolate and barren than the landscape is inconceivable. It is a vast plain covered with weather-worn rocks and boulders, piled into the strangest and most fantastic forms. This is the Karst, as it is called. Presently the sun rises, but its light can give no life to this chaos of grey stones, nor even lend it a less desert aspect. Suddenly there is a turn in the road; the traveller is riding along a terrace, on a steep hillside overgrown with vineyards, and far below glitters the Adriatic, brightly blue and flecked with white sails shining in the sun to the remotest rim of the sea. Those who have once experienced such a morning never forget it.

From Trieste the journey to Venice, and beyond,

lies through the most luxuriant and lovely lands. What wealth of vegetation and richness of colour! There is a blaze, a radiance, a glory of sunlight wherever we look. We almost fancy that we have never before seen any hue but grey. Even the sky is different—higher, bluer, more transparent. And when the sun sets and darkness falls suddenly, like a surprise, up comes the moon, the splendid moon of the Italian summer night. A faint idea may be formed of it when we remember how beautiful it can be in an August night in Norway. There is a power and splendour in that moonlight which almost makes a man crazy with passionate admiration, as he wanders for hours over moonlit plains, or through dark groves where the glowworms lurk, shining like diamonds among the brushwood.

And in Ibsen's case, besides these new impressions of nature, there was the glamour of ancient culture which met him at every step in the city he had chosen for his residence. The grandeur, the riches, and the beauty of Rome filled him with amazement, and by constant excursions into every part of the city he tried to familiarise himself with its monuments. His search for all these witnesses to a dead civilisation, and his contemplation of the ruins which told of its decay, suggested to him the idea of treating its fall in a dramatic form; the scheme of a drama, with Julian the Apostate as the leading figure, was duly meditated and the play partly written.

But other and more personal impressions gained the upper hand. Their very contrast with his present life set them more vividly before his mind. He felt as though his whole life in Norway had been spent in the dark. Like Oswald (in "Ghosts") he felt as if he could not remember ever having seen the sun shining in Norway, as though he had stolen away from a gloomy prison where he had lain in chains; and like an escaped prisoner who has regained his freedom, he vowed never to return thither. How squalid, cold, narrow, and small was everything in that Northern home!

But up from such thoughts and feelings as these rose a number of earlier impressions of Norwegian nature, vivified by the stimulating contrast of Then and Now. In one of his expeditions at the cost of the State, in search of popular poetry, he had, in the summer of 1862, gone on foot through Jotunheim. He had made his way from Lom across the mountain from Baeverdal down to Fortun. The view from the mountain-range down into the narrow Forundal, with its steep wild precipices, had left a picture which now revived in his mind. And from thence he had walked on from Vadeim by Förde to the little market-town of Hellesylt in Sundelven, where he had remained several days. In the immediate neighbourhood were the ruins of a parsonage which had been destroyed by a landslip from above. In fear of such another fall, it had never been restored; and the minister, with his wife and child, lodged in

a farmhouse clinging high up to the mountain-side. Ibsen went to visit him, and asked the priest's wife, an amiable young woman, whether she were not equally afraid of such a catastrophe here. "No," said she; "for the house is built so close against the cliff that the earth and stones would pass by without touching it."

These impressions of travel amalgamated in Ibsen's fancy to form that picture of the Norse mountain-valley which we know in *Brand*. And with this Norwegian dale a new concept of Norwegian nature found a place in literature.

The poets of an earlier time had only sung of what was fair, pleasing, and attractive in our out-door life. As he reads their writings a stranger might almost believe that in Norway the whole year was one soft and lovely summer. Kindly sunshine makes even the most barren spot of earth "a radiant little land of fable," as Welhaven says; in Asbjørnsen's tales we read of delicious wanderings in the forests and mountains, of the fragrance of pines and the song of birds; or of beautiful summer-evening moods, such as Jørgen Moe's poems are full of. And even when the key is not quite so high-pitched, it does not cease to be sweet. A melancholy spirit even, such as that of Bernhard Herre, went no further than to depict the sadness of autumn; and the elegies of A. Munch dwell only on the brevity of the Northern summer. None of them speak of the barrenness and inhospitality of the land. If by

any chance a poet alluded to the scenery of the highlands—as Welhaven, for instance, in *Eivind Bolt*—it is solely to speak of the grandiose impression produced by the mountain landscape; when winter is the theme, as in Jørgen Moe's *En Slaedefart* (A Sledge-Drive), the poet has no eye for anything but its magical beauty. Indeed, Ibsen himself paid tribute to the Nature of the North; in his *Højfjeldsliv* (Highland Life) he has given us a lively and glowing picture of the mountain region “in its glory of gold and amber.”

But we have only to take up *Brand* (a dramatic poem in five acts) to see the contrast. Here we are suddenly transported several degrees farther north, into a quite different land. The snow swirls thickly, the storm roars, the glaciers hang imminent over the cliff's edge, and the sun's rays never penetrate to shine on the dwellers in the depth of the gorge. At midsummer only, for three short weeks, do they see its warming rays, high above them, on the rocky wall. Everything that is frail and tender shivers, sickens, and dies. Corn never ripens; deformity and famine haunt the place like a curse. This is the mountain valley as we see it in *Brand*. And the valley had grown in Ibsen's imagination to be the typical Northern landscape. It was actually Norway, in *Brand*: just as Anholt is Denmark in Ludvig Holberg's *Peder Paars*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The great serio-comic classic of Danish literature. L. Holberg was born in 1684; died 1754.



The inhabitants of the gorge are the whole Norwegian people; and the picture of the race differs no less from the earlier notions accepted in literature than does the picture of the natural background. Hitherto all our writers had burnt incense to the Norwegian people. After 1814 enthusiastic verse had been sung in honour of the Sons of the Mountains, and this afflatus had lasted for many decades. When, in the forties, national romance had come to the front, the enthusiasm only changed its aspect. While before, the Odelsmand,<sup>1</sup> proud and free, had been the subject of ecstatic adulation, it was now the turn of the ideal peasant or Bonde, leading his peaceful life free from care, in poetic dreams undebased by his prosaic daily toil.

The people in Ibsen's mountain-valley are no such poetic figures. They are folk who labour bitterly to wring a pittance from grudging Nature, and the burden stultifies and exhausts them; it bows their necks and bends their backs; their eyes are fixed on the earth, their thoughts do not soar like a bird, they creep like a worm on its belly. Their daily food is all they care for, all they think about:—

Feeble is the flight, and low,  
That to your faint prayer is given;  
Yours is not the piercing woe  
That on will's strong pinions driven  
Penetrates the court of heaven;

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<sup>1</sup> The owner of a freehold.



“Give, oh ! give us daily bread !” —  
From its context torn, you cry ;  
All the other prayers unsaid,  
For this one you live and die ;  
Only this poor wreck survives  
In your faith-desolated lives.

But if these people are wholly and solely “a race given over to earthly cares,” at least they might be full of character. On the contrary, when they turn their left eye heavenward, their right eye is fixed on the earth. Hence the half-heartedness and apathy which are the stamp of the nation :—

Just wander thro' this land to-day  
And listen to what people say,  
And thou wilt find to each man cling  
A little piece of everything ;  
He's slightly loyal on the whole,  
A little serious for his soul,  
A little given to table-pleasure,—  
But so his fathers were, in measure,—  
A little warm, when hearth and hall  
Re-echo songs about “the small  
But rock-firm people of the rock,  
Who at all foreign menace mock,”  
A little prodigal of pledges,  
A little smart to blunt their edges,  
A little quick to start, but clever  
In dawdling on and on for ever.  
The words “a little” gauge his spirit,  
He goes not far in fault or merit ;  
In good and ill alike a fraction,  
Restlessly passive, faint in action,  
Made up of fragments, each sufficient  
To spoil the other's coefficient.

And as the nation is, so is its notion of God :—

As Papists feign our souls' Redeemer  
A baby on His Mother's breast,  
You fancy God a worn-out dreamer  
In second childhood sunk to rest. . .  
The race is old, and paints its God  
With velvet cap and senile nod.

And while thus attacking the nation, the poet turns his keen-edged weapon against the official representatives ; chiefly the village-mayor, who has become the mere official to such a degree that he has altogether ceased to be a man. When he ought to relieve the needy he does not inquire into their necessities, but only whether they dwell within his district or no ; and if his house is burning he gives his soul over to the devil if only he may save the archives. He is a well-meaning man, who toils hard for the good of his district, but he has no eye for anything but material prosperity. The growth of the population, the increase of revenue, the development of trade—these are the services of which he boasts ; and his highest dream of beneficence is the erection of a building which shall ingeniously combine rooms for public entertainments and elections with a prison, a lunatic-asylum, and a poor-house. If only this scheme could be carried out, every requirement would be satisfied. Anything beyond this is mischievous, unless it be a very little sentiment in the evening hours, and a very little eloquent excitement when the punch is brought in after a

public dinner. He is not merely a mayor, but a *Storthingsmand* (a member of the Norwegian Parliament) as well, and in this capacity too he gets a lashing when Brand says of him that he is

A full-blooded patriot head,  
Right-minded, courteous, free from passion,  
And not inactive, in a fashion,  
And yet a scourge to lash men dead.  
No fierce infection of the blood,  
No famine, landslip, frost, or flood,  
That blights a province through and through,  
Does half the damage he can do ;  
Life can be won from pestilence,  
But he destroys man's very sense ;  
He chains the will that's strong and young,  
He drowns the songs that might be sung,  
His pinched and pigeon-breasted mind  
Goes out to murder his own kind,  
To slay the smile on simple lips,  
To veil the soul's light in eclipse,  
And with a bloodless arm to smother  
The love hearts bear to one another.

The Provost is even worse. . Just as the Mayor relegates everything that may improve the mind to leisure hours and festal occasions, so does he keep everything like religion for Sunday. On working days men must work ; only on Sunday have they time to rest, and then it is the priest's duty to lead them to the ideal ; but as soon as he is out of the pulpit his task is done. A preacher has no concern with the souls of the individuals of his congregation ; he is first and foremost an official in the service

of the State, whose duty is to consider what is best for the State, and then what is best for himself.

Finally, in the Schoolmaster and the Sexton the official element of the lower orders is held up to ridicule. The Schoolmaster, who, like the Mayor, has been a member of the Storting, says to his colleague :—

But, then, we two obey a different law  
From that which holds the mountain-side in awe.  
We're sworn official guardians of the district,  
Bound to each other in a close relation ;  
We must protect the Church and education ;  
The rule which keeps us isolated *is* strict ;  
To stand outside all party's our vocation.

And afterwards, when they hear Brand playing the organ, we have this characteristic dialogue :—

*Schoolmaster.*

Hum ! some folks might be stirred to hear !

*Sexton.*

But not a public officer.

*Schoolmaster.*

Ah ! some one of a free condition,  
Not bound to think of his position.

*Sexton.*

Yes ! one who'd dare to throw away  
His books—and have the devil to pay.

*Schoolmaster.*

Ah ! but to stop the official wheel,  
And dare to *feel* one moment, Sexton !

*Sexton.*

Nobody's looking—let us feel !

*Schoolmaster.*

No ! one would find that it had vexed one  
To have sunk to common people's sphere ;  
We must not wish to feel, I fear.  
The parson says, to try to be  
Two things at once will never do ;  
*Even he who wants to, can't, you see,*  
*Be man and functionary too.*

These several outbreaks against the official class, as the cause of the ineptitude and materialism of the people, had their origin partly in the conditions of the times, and partly in the conception of the State which had grown up in Ibsen's mind under the direct influence of that State.

A large portion of the years which had elapsed between Ibsen's first manhood and his departure from Norway had been a period of dull unspirituality. But it had been a golden age for the official class, a time when adroit administration had played an important part. Some questions of national independence had no doubt occasionally arisen—such as the Theatre question, and the Ministerial question—and had given rise to violent agitations, but the men who had stirred up these movements were regarded by the majority as disturbers of the peace and frenzied demagogues. The

point aimed at was not the independence of the nation, far less its spiritual evolution, but simply its economical prosperity. Roads were laid, huge and handsome prisons were constructed, commerce was extended, manufactures were encouraged, unions were formed to repress dram-drinking, and many more or less useful things were achieved. The only misfortune was that by such means men believed that they were solving the great problems of Government. Everything which lay beyond the province of the necessities of life was mere rhodomontade, to be sternly reprehended. The people were to be as uniform and commonplace as the clerks in an office, or the soldiers of a regiment. The ideal of a good citizen was an average mortal of no marked character or individuality, whose rule of life was to walk the earth in humble self-annihilation. The Provost's speech was typical:—

Consider what a feeble flock  
Ye are, and from how mean a stock ;  
Born for no stalwart deeds are ye,  
Unfit to set the captive free ;  
Ye have your little daily task,  
And more than that we dare not ask.  
What would ye betwixt wolf and bear ?  
'Twixt hawk and eagle battling there ?  
My sheep, my children ! learn, ye are  
The victor's prize, the gage of war.

It was to this base materialism that Ibsen attributed Norway's indifferent attitude during the Danish-

German war; he returns to the charge again and again in his writings.

Still, the root of the evil lay deeper than in any merely local conditions of the times. It was firmly rooted in the modern notion of the State, and it was against this that our author directed his weapons, in the name of freedom and individuality. It is the Provost again who unconsciously leads the battle:—

The State's—deny it if you can—  
Exactly half republican ;  
No good in freedom will it see,  
Yet dearly loves equality ;  
But how can all mankind be equal  
Till all are smoothed to one dead plane ?  
You preach this oneness, but the sequel  
Proves all your levelling projects vain ;  
Your democratic schemes imply  
More individuality,  
And wider range in low and high.

The task in hand is to make every one march in time:—

An equal space for every step,  
And keeping every foot in line ;—  
It's to that system I incline.

The ideal leader is a corporal; and the Church, which, as a State establishment, is part of the regulating machinery of the State, must adopt this method in every particular. The preacher must learn of the corporal to lead his troop through life into Paradise at a firm and steady pace.



Thus the attack on the people of Norway leads to a satire on the official class ; and on the established Church as its tool.

Brand himself is in every respect the opposite of all that Ibsen attacks. All that the people lack he has in abundance ; he is the incarnation of determination and idealism, of strength and enthusiasm. In the energy of his individuality he opposes the predominant spirit of compromise with the inexorable motto, "All or nothing ;" and as advocate for the rights of the individual he fights the official representative of the people, both on secular and spiritual grounds. To think of Brand as embodying Ibsen himself would be absurd ; for although Brand is an ideal figure, he, like all of Ibsen's creations, is not complete from the first ; he develops as the action of the piece proceeds. Though Ibsen always stands behind his utterances, he is never to be identified with his hero. What he has tried to create is an ideal contrast with the reality he is satirising : and this has determined the aspect of the man. His development is worked out by his gradual recognition of the impossibility of harmonising this contrast. His efforts are directed to awakening and steeling the people, so that each man, as a free individual, shall shake off his lethargy. So he declares war against their official representative in the person of the Mayor in these words :—

Those, whom your leaders without number  
Have lulled to sleep, shall wake from slumber.

These remnants of our mountain-stuff  
Have pined in cages long enough ;  
Your mean starvation-regimen  
Produces weak and mopish men ;  
'Tis you have drained their blood away,  
Have doomed their courage to decay,  
Have stamped in fragments of a whole  
What should have stood a moulded soul ;—  
Yet still within your ears may rattle  
The awakening thunder-shout “ To battle ! ”

He begins this struggle against the authorities by first becoming such an official personage himself : he becomes minister of his native parish. Life and movement begin to stir around him ; but he is not wholly satisfied, he feels that under the conditions in which he is working there is not room enough for his ideal. The old Church is too small for the God he preaches, so he determines to build a large new one ; but the execution of this plan leads him to discern that he, the preacher of logic, has placed himself in an ambiguous and illogical predicament. The Provost's words as to the relation of the Church to the State rouse him to a clear apprehension of this, and by asserting that the “ Spirit of compromise ” is of the devil, he is led to the great and fatal breach which is figuratively expressed by his locking the church door and throwing the key into the torrent. What is tragical in his fate is that he acquires too late the insight which leads to this breach, and that he has made his great sacrifice in vain, because, bravely as he has striven for whole-

ness and completeness of achievement, he has lived unconsciously under the influence of that spirit of concession which he designates as the tempter. Brand is no ideal figure in the ordinary sense of the word; he is a struggling soul which is developed by the struggle; and however truly he may be the advocate of Ibsen's own polemical views, Ibsen has treated him objectively in so far as he has made him a man, and not a mouthpiece.

Artistically speaking, he is a creation of the imagination, not a figure from real life. This arises from the fact that he was planned as a contrasting image; he is to contrast with reality, not to embody it. Nevertheless, the germ of this figure is to be detected in various impressions from real life.

At the time when *Brand* was published it was accepted as an essentially Christian poem—principally, no doubt, because Brand himself is a priest. Then it came to be regarded as a sort of comminatory sermon, on the pattern of those which reek of sulphur-fumes and hell-fire. But Ibsen had already anticipated such a misapprehension of his purpose. He makes Einar take this mistaken view of the matter when he says to Brand:—

Thou art of that young brood that cries  
Life is made up of mockeries,—  
One who the world of feeling dashes  
Pell-mell into a sack of ashes.

To which Brand replies:—

I am no death's-head at life's feast ;  
 I speak not as a parish priest ;  
 I take my place in nature's plan,  
 Not as a Christian, but a man,  
 And diagnose, with doctor's eye,  
 This deadly thing whereof we die.

In these last four lines Brand's whole nature is set forth with the crisp decision of an explanatory note ; and lest it should fail of clearness, he says soon after :—

It is not churches, no, nor creeds  
 For sake of which my spirit bleeds ;  
 Since, as both saw an opening day,  
 So both may fade and pass away ;  
 Created things, though fair we find them,  
 Have *Finis* somewhere graved behind them.

One thing is quite clear : it is the Man, the individual personality, that he desires to lift out of the dust. This standpoint, it is plain, is far from being that of the pietist. We have only to read such lines as these :—

Nay ! joy destroys no human breast,—  
 Though if it were so, it were best.  
 Be not the slave of thy delight,  
 Yet serve it on from night to night.  
 Be not one thing to-day, and borrow  
 Some other semblance for to-morrow.  
 That which thou art, be wholly it,  
 Not piecemeal—and from bit to bit.

and we cannot fail to see the universal and purely human character of his aim. Just as hostile argu-

ment against the Church is but a small part of the polemics of the poem, so is religious sentiment but a small part of Brand's individuality. Ibsen, too, has himself told us that there was no necessity for making Brand a priest, or for stating the problem as a religious one.

"I could quite equally well have applied the whole syllogism to a sculptor or a politician as to a priest. I could quite as well have worked out the impulse which drove me to write the piece, by taking Galileo, for instance, as my leading figure, instead of Brand—assuming, of course, that Galileo should stand firm, and never concede the fixity of the earth," he wrote in a letter to George Brandes.

It is, nevertheless, by no mere accident that Brand is a priest; it is the result of the realistic impressions, which form as it were the skeleton of the figure, having originated in Church matters. Danish critics, among them Brandes, followed by the majority of German critics who have written on Ibsen within the last few years, have connected Brand with Sören Abye Kierkegaard,<sup>1</sup> and are of opinion that his ideas and his attacks on the Church gave rise to this drama. It is easy to see how this misunderstanding may have arisen among foreigners unfamiliar with Norwegian affairs; for that such a resemblance exists cannot be disputed. When

<sup>1</sup> 1813-1855. The most remarkable religious philosopher whom Denmark has produced.

Kierkegaard laments the wretchedness of the times, when he appeals to the individual personality of each human being and condemns society, when he attacks public Christianity from a Catholic human standpoint, when he, himself a theologian who had preached to the multitude, could declare in his later years that he would rather commit the grossest crime than ever enter a church again, it is easy to detect his resemblance to Brand. At the same time the comparison fails if we seek such a type as Brand in the character of Kierkegaard. When *Brand* was written Ibsen knew very little of Kierkegaard; he had not read many pages of his writings; a few of *Enter-eller* (Either—or—) and of *Öjeblikket* (the Present Moment), and that was all.<sup>1</sup> Of course the agitation produced in Norway by Kierkegaard's works was a known fact; but it made no very deep impression on Ibsen, and he never felt himself moved to become "Kierkegaard's poet," though he was called so.

But the thing which had greatly attracted his attention was the battle fought out in his native town of Skien, towards the end of the fifties, by pastor G. A. Lammers. Lammers was six-and-forty, and had been a priest above twenty years when he was appointed to the ministry at Skien.

<sup>1</sup> In *Enter-eller*, 1843, the aesthetic and ethical ways of life are contrasted. *Öjeblikket* was a sort of periodical; only nine numbers were published, in the last year of Kierkegaard's life. In this he argues against "Official Christianity." A mere glance into this might indeed have affected Ibsen deeply.



He presently after made a long journey abroad for the benefit of his health, and it was on his return home that he started the religious movement which was afterwards known by his name. The whole thing began in certain pangs of conscience which he felt when pronouncing absolution and fulfilling certain other priestly duties. In the year 1855 he wished to be allowed a curate to undertake such functions as he no longer dared to exercise. But at last even this failed to relieve his mind, and in June, 1856, he begged and received his dismissal with a pension. He forthwith took a step which deprived him of this allowance; he renounced his allegiance to the established Church, and founded a "free apostolic Christian congregation" at Skien. In his petition to retire he had stated that his yearly income was no more than 5000 krone<sup>1</sup> from his parish, and that he was the father of two children otherwise unprovided for. His labours in Skien had been productive of much agitation—eager support from some, hostility, scorn, and mockery from others. "He unhesitatingly censured disorder and crime, even in domestic and civic life," we are told in a picture of him written at the time. He would send his curate or the schoolmaster "into the town and to every house in it, bearing his greeting, and with instructions to inquire as far as might be possible into the worldly and spiritual

<sup>1</sup> The krone is worth rather more than thirteen pence, or twenty-eight cents.



condition of every member of the congregation." He was an imperious and inexorable "father of souls," who stormed vehemently against all weakness and worldliness.

But if he had given rise to much restlessness and ebullition while he still was a servant of the established Church, he made matters far worse when he had quitted it. His farewell sermon is printed, and is very interesting reading. Never was the Norwegian Church so fiercely assailed from its own pulpit. He had on a previous occasion spoken of the churches as playhouses; in his farewell address he gives proofs of his assertion. The Sacraments ought not to be administered to every comer; only those who "in truth turn to the Lord." "The unrepentant and disbelieving are to have no part in them, even though they may not be recognised sinners; unless they declare that they will be converted." Infant baptism too is monstrous: "Rather let our children remain unbaptized and unblessed. Rather let us be honest heathen than allow ourselves to be led by mere neighbourly considerations, to make use of the institutions of the Church to increase and bring up a generation of liars and hypocrites."

He was equally averse to any religious ceremony of marriage or burial. "Indeed, I may say that so-called Christian burial in so-called consecrated ground has been anguish to my soul, and seems to me a horrible confirmation of disbelief and im-

penitence; not merely when false and delusive words are spoken over the dead, the more shocking in proportion as the departed and those who have followed him to the grave belong to the cultured and intelligent class; but even when they are words of truth intended to arouse the living, and when, though he who is laid in the earth cannot with any reasonable hope be accounted as one of those who die in the Lord, he is nevertheless dedicated with flowers and hymns to a joyful resurrection. We are not called upon to pronounce judgment on the dead; but not, on the other hand, to absolve them." And after much more in the same vein he ended his sermon with a prayer "that, if it were possible, the day might come when, in this so-called house of God, nothing might ever be done contrary to God's will; and that here in this lovely valley, which the hand of God would seem to have decked to be His garden, in our streets and roads, in our houses and fields, on our seas and in our forests, no word of blasphemy should evermore be heard, no church service ever be performed, but only the worship of God in spirit and in truth, on holidays and working days alike."

Ibsen had known Lammers personally, and his manly, courageous conduct had impressed him greatly. It is easy to find points of resemblance between Lammers and Brand, even in minor details; and when, after this, Lammers gathered his adherents about him and led them away to the fields

or heights, there to worship God, we again note a startling likeness. "Kierkegaard was too much of a drawing-room agitator," Ibsen once observed to the author of this biography; "Lammers on the contrary was just such an open-air agitator as Brand is." But in this, as in other cases, Ibsen's attitude to his material is a very independent one; it was his starting point, but not his goal. He never intended to give the portrait and elucidate the nature of such another man as Lammers; he merely made such use of him as was needful for his purpose.

This purpose was to emphasise the difference between "the thing as it was and the thing as it ought to be."

This is also seen by the keen style and form of the writing. It is a denunciation, a comminatory sermon. It deals with matters of life and death; there is no question of compromise. Ibsen originally began the work as an epic poem, and when he subsequently adopted the dramatic form he observed its conditions only so far as they were compatible with his polemical aims. He did not trouble himself about the requirements of probability and strict dramatic causation. In the ideal sphere in which his hero moves such considerations are of minor importance; indeed, he did not even care to make his personages express themselves exactly as they probably would have done in real life. His satirical and polemical aim was so entirely predominant that

he makes them rage at themselves in grotesque self-description. When Einar becomes a convert he says of himself:—

I'm cleansed and rinsed, above, below ;  
I'm scrubbed with faith from top to toe ;  
No fleck of mud clings to my dress  
In the washing-tub of holiness ;  
By circumspection's dolly smacked,  
My Adam's garments shine intact ;  
And from the laundry-soap of prayer  
I rise a surplice, snowy-fair.

And the Mayor, the Provost, the Schoolmaster, and the Sexton do not spare themselves. It is war to the knife from beginning to end; there is no quarter; no truce is possible, excepting in the scenes where Agnes appears. She is the pacifying element in this sharp storm of battle, she is like a warm flowing current in the middle of an ice-bound river; all the warmth, all the wealth of feeling which the poet saw around and about him, found utterance in this figure, and she has a wonderful effect in the surroundings among which he has placed her. The still home-life, which Ibsen, in spite of his strong feeling for it, treated so unmercifully in the "Comedy of Love," finds compensation here in the person of Agnes; and when the writer at last represents the platform on which the fight was waged as being swept away by an avalanche, we step back from it with a complete impression of sweetness and bitterness, of longing for peace and yet also for battle.

This impression gives an accurate notion of the author. His naturally gentle nature has, in the rough struggle of life, armed itself with breastplate and sword; but his heart beats as warmly as ever under the coat of mail.

The battle was not ended with *Brand*. In the following year Ibsen came forth once more, armed cap-a-pie with another dramatic poem. *Peer Gynt* is nearly related to *Brand*. If *Brand* is the antipodes, *Peer Gynt* is the representative of the Norwegian people; the former shows what it lacks, the latter shows what it is. In *Brand*'s description of the Norwegian race we have a foreshadowing of *Peer Gynt*. It is all to be found in these lines, quoted before:—

Just wander through this land to-day  
And listen to what people say,  
And thou wilt find to each man cling  
A little scrap of everything. . . .  
The words "a little" gauge his spirit,  
He goes not far in fault or merit;  
In good or ill alike a fraction,  
Restlessly passive, faint in action,  
Made up of fragments, each sufficient  
To mar the others' co-efficient.

Peer Gynt himself is stamped as typical of the nation, all the deficiencies Ibsen had noted in it are in him; he is hesitancy, weakness, and egoism

personified. If we do not keep this well in mind a great deal in the poem becomes unintelligible, and we are in danger of much misapprehension. Even George Brandes has not escaped this peril. He quotes the song of the Nöster from the fifth act :—

We are thoughts ;  
 Thou should'st have thought us.  
 . . . . .  
 We are a riddle ;  
 Thou should'st have solved us.  
 . . . . .  
 We are works ;  
 Thou should'st have performed us.

And he adds this comment : “ Accusing words, these, with which the poet may perhaps have spurred himself on in hours of weakness, but which we cannot possibly think of as self-accusation on the part of Peer Gynt. How should the miserable Peer ever have given any one a watchword, how should he blame himself for having neglected it ? ” If we regard Peer Gynt as typical of the nation, the accusation has a sense without our needing to take refuge in the far-fetched notion that the whole song was a personal outburst on the part of the poet. The scene on the coast of Morocco, where Peer Gynt is brought into contact with other national types, has a strangely whimsical aspect until we give prominence to his representative national character.

At the same time, *Peer Gynt* would not have



been so sterling and living a work, if the author had maintained this typical character throughout. He began with an abstraction, but ended by depicting a living individual.

Peer Gynt is not perhaps so much the Norwegian in general as he is the Norwegian of a particular period, namely, of the close of the romantic period. Even in *Brand* we find scattered hits at the romantic element—for instance, the Mayor's enthusiasm over the times of King Bele—but here the ball is aimed straight at the heart of romanticism. There are, in various literary works, allied types of the transition period between the romantic school and our own day. In Turguéneff's *Rudin*, Spielhagen's *Problematische Naturen*, and later in Schandorp's *Uden Midpunkt* (Without a Centre), we find figures which have this in common with Peer Gynt; but they are fantastic images, without sufficient substance to give us a sense of reality. Ibsen, however, has gone to work in his own fashion. While other writers have chosen their heroes out of the upper classes, he has taken his from among the people. Peer Gynt is not a product of artistic romanticism, but of the popular national romanticism on which the more artistic type was based. It is well known that Ibsen borrowed not only the name of Peer Gynt, but various other details, from Asbjørnsen's and Moe's *Folkeeventyr* and from Asbjørnsen's *Huldre-eventyr*;<sup>1</sup> and it is expressly stated in the drama

<sup>1</sup> Popular tales, and fairy tales.

that the germ of Peer Gynt's whimsicalities lay in the legends on which his mother brought him up, so to speak. Aase says :—

We knew no better plan than to forget ;  
For 'tis too hard to struggle against fate,  
To see its grim shape reared athwart one's vision,  
And try to press those thronging thoughts aside ;  
One man tries brandy, and another lies !  
Ah ! well, we tried the charm of fairy-stories.

To the reader who now takes up *Peer Gynt* this juxtaposition of brandy and fairy-tales does not seem so appropriate ; but twenty years ago it was a very different thing ; it was a slap in the face for everything which at that time was still current in literature.

The education bestowed on Peer Gynt had borne fruit ; as we first see him he is a fantastic visionary, who goes about in a waking dream instead of doing anything methodical. When he tells the story of Gudbrand Glesne's ride over the edge of the precipice—the Gjendihöide—on the back of a reindeer, he firmly believes that he did it himself, though his notion of the Gjendihöide is so inexact that it is evident he has never seen it. A moment after, he falls into a reverie at the sight of a wonderful cloud, forgets the wedding guests and everything else, and fancies he is riding that cloud as an emperor. And when he nevertheless screws up his courage to action, it is through defiance, the motive power of all weak natures. Out of defiance he flies with

Ingrid; and the deed is in itself so ill-considered, so crazy and eccentric, that none but a visionary could have done it. For a minute indeed it dawns upon him that a life of action is better than a life of dreaming; he feels as though the whole population were hunting him like a wild animal:—

Burst! shatter! outclamour the waterfall!  
Strike! rend up the pine-tree, roots and all!  
This is life! this will harden and nourish the mind!  
To hell with the lies that we left behind!

But this aspiration is of brief duration. Ere long he is again so lost in rhapsody that he can scarcely distinguish between the facts of his experience and the events which are but the fiction of his dreams:—

Flight over the Gjendi passes—  
A cursèd ballad of lies!  
The bride's ride over the precipice—  
A dream in a drunken guise!  
Hunted by kites and kestrels,  
Threatened by trolls, and nursed  
By crazy maids of the mountain—  
A ballad of lies accurst!

And whenever he meets with the serious realities of life, he clutches at the means of escape which his mother taught him, and flies to the world of phantasy, to

Forget what is false and awry,  
And all that is sore and rough.

He always goes round and outside everything,

never straight through ; even by his mother's death-bed he will not look truth in the face, but beguiles her and himself away from it. What a difference between Brand's hard but high-minded conduct at his mother's death, and this pitiful rhapsodising, giving his mother the *viaticum* of a lie ! Aase's death was undoubtedly imagined by Ibsen as the contrast to that of Brand's mother.

The double existence lived by Peer Gynt necessarily results in a genuinely *romantic* half-heartedness ; it gives rise to cowardice and indecision, selfishness and blundering ; it sets an impassable gulf between desire and action, between the will and the energy to act. His motto is characteristic of him :—

Yes ! think it and wish it, as much as you will,  
But *do* it ! No, that will I never !

Everything that Peer Gynt does is but half-done. He never can make up his mind to any decisive step, whether for good or evil ; he destroys with one hand what he has done with the other ; he is devoid of character, and his image is a blurred one. He must be thrown back into the melting-pot, for he has not developed into a real man, but only into an egoist, the misshapen image of a man who is not " himself " (true to himself) but only " self-sufficient." When we read *Peer Gynt* we are involuntarily reminded of H. C. Oersted's maxim, " Forget your Self, but do not lose your Self." It is the very essence of

Peer Gynt that his life is the converse of this precept: he has lost his Self, but he never forgets it.

Thus the figure originally intended to typify the nation becomes typical of the period which Ibsen himself had known in its final phase, and with which he has broken once for all in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. There is far less of direct satire in *Peer Gynt* than in *Brand*. In all the first three acts we find only one ironical passage on Norwegian exclusiveness, uttered in the patriotic maxim of the Old Man of the Dovre:—

The ox gives mead and the cow gives flour,—  
Ask not if it be sweet or sour ;  
The main thing is, and don't you forget it,  
You haven't to go from home to get it.

And a similar satire on the Maalstraeverne<sup>1</sup> is introduced in the scene in the madhouse at Cairo, where Huhu describes the language of the ourang-outang:—

Listen ! In the East afar  
Stands the coast of Malabar.  
Europe like a hungry vulture  
Overpowers the land with culture,

---

<sup>1</sup> Maalstraeverne (the strivers for speech), as they were called, were a party who aimed at forming a Norwegian language distinct from the Danish. There are, in fact, only a relatively small number of essentially Norwegian words.

For the Dutch and Portuguese  
Hold the country at their ease.  
Where the natives once held sway,  
Now their chiefs are driven away ;  
And the new lords have combined  
In a language to their mind.  
In the olden days long fled,  
Th' Ourang-Outang was lord and head,  
He was chief by wood and flood,  
Snared and slaughtered as he would ;  
As the hand of nature shaped,  
So he grinned and so he gaped ;  
Unabashed he howled and yelled,  
For the reins of state he held.  
Out alas ! for Progress came,  
And destroyed his name and fame ;  
All the monkey-men with ears  
Vanished for four hundred years ;  
If we now would preach or teach,  
We must use the help of speech.  
I alone have striven hard  
To become a monkey-bard ;  
I have vivified the dream,  
Proved the people's right to scream,  
Screamed myself, and, by inditing,  
Showed its use in folk-song writing.  
Oh ! that I could make men see  
The bliss of being apes like me.

The two other madmen who appear in that scene are also intended as a direct satire on things Norwegian ; but the irony is so covert that it can scarcely be understood without some explanation of its purport. The "Fellah with the corpse of his king on his back" is meant for Sweden, and the



corpse is that of Charles XII. Like this Fella, Sweden is very proud of its hero-king, but without showing during the Danish-German war that in any way it resembled him, save only that, like him, it "remained perfectly dead." And the Minister Hussein, who fancies that he is a pen, is a symbolical hit all round at the senseless addresses and notes which the Franco-German war elicited from the Swedo-Norwegian authorities: especially from one conspicuous Swedish statesman, who was extremely proud of his "notes" throughout the war, and firmly believed that they had exercised a decisive influence on the course of events. The drama is on the whole worked out on the lines of a general poetical and psychological scheme, rather than from the satirical point of view; and by giving his hero the aspect of a transitional class of the nineteenth century world, the poet has created a type of which the truth is of general application beyond the limits of Norway or the North. Thus Passarge, who translated the poem into German, says of it: "*Peer Gynt*, like every great poem, is a picture of Man, always struggling, always erring, always striving for liberty. It takes rank with the *Odyssey*, the *Divina Commedia*, *Don Quixote*, and *Faust*. *Peer Gynt*, with all its defects, is the poem which bears most clearly the sign-manual of our times on its brow; and if only a full commentary were written, to throw light on it as a whole and in all its details, many of them mere allusions to things

of the day, it would remain to future generations a faithful reflection of our century, and constantly excite the admiration of posterity."

After this splendid overture, the curtain rose, in 1869, on the first genuine comedy of modern life which Norwegian literature ever produced. In the "Comedy of Love," Ibsen had already made an attempt in this direction; but at that time his indignation was too hot, and the outcome was polemical, not a comedy. He lashed his *dramatis personæ* instead of merely showing up their ridiculous side. In *Brand* the surges of his wrath had risen still higher, and Ibsen had devoted his pen almost wholly to argument and vituperation. But in *Peer Gynt* they had already sunk to a calm, and when he wrote *De Unges Forbund* (The Young Men's League) in 1868-69, the poet's temper was so far pacified that he felt the redeeming power of laughter as he contemplated the types and circumstances he proposed to make the subject of his ridicule.

When, after four years absence from his native land, Ibsen studied its domestic politics, he could not retain any very favourable notion of them. The antagonism between the two parties must needs appear to him trivial and sentimental. There was not as yet so wide a gulf between the Right and Left as subsequently yawned. Their differences were not so much opposite views of life as dissimilar opinions on some minor political questions, such as always divide the mob; and though the division might, and

did, become serious, as yet there was no real danger. In the sixties the struggle was not for life or death, as it was later, in the eighties. To the spectator from outside it might well look like a mere contest between those who had the power and those who desired to possess it, and in such a battle there would be nothing to inspire a writer such as Ibsen. To him its course and issue could only be a matter of indifference. Thus he stood in an independent and superior attitude towards the antagonistic parties, and could lash them right and left just as he was minded. Lundestad the country gentleman, and Bratsberg the chamberlain, fare as badly as Stensgaard the lawyer and Monsen the landed proprietor. The chamberlain is represented as an aristocrat of the old school who has lost all touch with the times in which he lives, and Lundestad as a man who thinks any means good enough, if only they conduce to his end without bringing him into the clutches of the law. Stensgaard and Monsen are fortune-hunters who try to rise, Monsen by swindling, Stensgaard by speechifying. None of them have any interests at heart but their own.

Stensgaard is a typical figure of the middle of the century. His high-sounding eloquence is the ordinary liberal swagger of the average politician of the time. The liberal party had its foothold in national romanticism; its oratory was a compound of Johann Sverdrup's aphorisms with Björnson's phrases and figures of speech, and partly too of Grundtvig's

genuine utterances. Björnson, especially, had many admirers, who imitated his original manner; but what in the model was characteristic and interesting, was artificial and absurd in the crowd of commonplace copyists. It is such an imitation that Ibsen has depicted in Stensgaard, and their lingo is hit off with unerring certainty. Stensgaard and Peer Gynt have not only egoism but vacillation in common: "I have known him from childhood: vulgarity at home, high aspirations at school. Instinct, character, will, talents—each taking a different road. What can it lead to but a frittered individuality?" so Dr. Fjeldbo speaks of him. His "high aspirations" at school have developed in him an emotional but very shallow sentimental faculty, and a certain skill in expressing his feelings. The vulgarity at home has stunted his character.

The father's love of indolence has, in the son, taken the form of a craving for luxury; his mother's sordid nature and the debasing trade she plied, have also left their mark on him; the pawnbroker's son has not the smallest notion of honour; he has no self-respect, no sense of honour. He has an open mind, but his insight is undeveloped, and he has no self-knowledge. He is governed by his impulses, and has never learnt to doubt himself. Hence he is utterly incapable of self-condemnation, and always firmly believes that what he feels, says, or does, is indisputable. He is carried away by his own rhetoric; he is the slave of fine words; and a blind

confidence in words is the basis of his power. When he dresses up his selfishness in generously-sounding phrases he carries every one with him whose judgment is as weak as his own; and having thus dazzled himself, he does not discern his self-interestedness in all its nakedness. Thus he easily is led to be very indignant with the proceedings of another, though he himself may have done the very same thing. (See the passage in which he addresses Bastian, who wishes to marry Fru Rundholm.) He leads others astray because he has first led himself astray. To these characteristics he adds extravagant conceit. He worships himself, and his aim in life is to attain as high a place in the opinion of others as in his own self-esteem. Like all *parvenus*, he is as vain as he is reckless of others; he regards nothing but what he calls his goal.

His eloquence and his ruthlessness, his ambition and his vanity, his absence of all self-criticism, and lack of all sense of honour, combine to make him a very dangerous person, who is likely to produce much confusion before he attains his end. Happily he has two qualities which greatly diminish the danger. He is easily seen through, and he blurts everything out quite heedlessly. The art of dissimulation needs maturer consideration than he possesses. And besides, he is too confiding ever to imagine that men mean anything but what they say; he believes in the words of others as entirely as he believes in his own fine phrases. How should

he see through the statements of other men when he cannot even see through his own? We need only think of him in the scene where Lundestad contrives so cleverly to lead him by the nose, and reduce him to such complete self-revelation.

*De Unges Forbund* is a comedy of the day, of the very highest rank; even the subsidiary figures are stamped with a reality which had at that time no parallel in Norwegian literature. In technical qualities, too, the play marks an epoch. The colloquial speech, which Ibsen had vainly tried to reproduce in the "Comedy of Love," is here kept up throughout with masterly ease. The parts are not written, but spoken; the language is that of conversation, of gossip; the actors dispute and quarrel exactly as in real life. Even the loose construction of ordinary conversation is here reproduced; the talk is that of every day.

That such a work as this should give rise to much misapprehension is a matter of course; it was the first example of a perfectly new order of literature. And it was such a surprise, so unexpected, that the natural point of sight was missed. It established a new relation with real life, much closer than any former work had achieved; and as it dealt with the representatives of political parties, it was at once supposed that Ibsen had had his eye on particular individuals, and every one set to work to identify the originals of Ibsen's personages. That this process was degrading a noble imaginative work to



the level of a political pamphlet occurred to no one. Even those who did not go so far as this were convinced that the play was intended to serve political ends. To ridicule a political Liberal was to them the same thing as to ridicule liberal views in general; and in the first ebullition of party passion the fact that the piece lashed both factions alike was overlooked. "A one-sided partisanship has found utterance in literature," as a notice in the *Aftenblad* said, and when once this had been assumed, it was easy enough to come forward as the champion of poetry and belabour the author in her name. In this notice, written as it was by no less a man than Kristian Elster,<sup>1</sup> the insulting accusation was flung at Ibsen that "He had broken with his own past, that he had left hold of everything he had formerly clung to, that he had betrayed the ideal, and dimmed the spirit of poetry, while the spirit of provincialism and commonplace was raised to the dignity of an ensample."

Selma's outburst in the third act was, in his opinion, "the only moment in the play when a gust of fresh air blew in, untainted by any pestilential breath of base passion or milk-and-water morality." And even men of greater mark were guilty of a similar misunderstanding. Björnson's famous verses to Johann Sverdrup were, in the first instance, expressly aimed at "The Young Men's League."

<sup>1</sup> Next to Björnson, Lie, and Kjelland, one of the best novelists of Norway.

On the side of the conservatives, opinion was not more appreciative, only more moderate; the treatment of the conservative representatives was favourable in the piece, but this was overlooked, and the play as a whole was regarded as a demonstration of political opinion.

A vehement crisis in the agitation concerning the play, brought about by political party-feeling, broke out when it was produced on the stage of the Christiania theatre. The first modern Norwegian comedy made its appearance on the chief stage in its native land amid a wild chorus of hissing and clapping, of cat-calls and applause.

The first performance was on the 18th of October 1869. Part of the audience gave expression to their approval, while the others protested with loud hisses. On the night of the second performance, the 20th of October, the battle assumed more serious proportions. The very first words—Lundestad's speech on the 17th May—were hissed and clapped for some minutes, and the curtain was finally let down. The manager then came forward to ask the audience whether they desired that the piece should be proceeded with, in which case he begged for silence. The play went on without interruption as far as Bastian Monsen's speech in the fourth act. "Do you know what the nation means? The nation means the people, the common people—the people who have nothing, and are nothing—who are bound in servitude"— Here the storm burst once more, and was

lulled, only to break out again at the fall of the curtain after the last act. At last, when the gas was turned out, the tumult subsided in the theatre; but it was carried on in the corridors, and even in the street. At the third representation, when the house was so crammed that even the seats in the orchestra were sold, the uproar was renewed, and it was not till the fourth performance that peace and order were restored.

Ibsen was for a short time the guest of the Khedive in Egypt, where he was present at the opening of the Suez Canal. It was here that the news reached him of the reception of his play; and how deeply it wounded him to think that it had been dragged into the vortex of political warfare he himself has told us. The frame of mind which the news induced subsequently found expression in a little poem, *Ved Port Said* (At Port Said):—

The dawn of the Eastern Land  
Over the haven glittered ;  
Flags from all corners of the earth  
Quivered from the masts,  
Tones of music  
Bore onward the cantata ;  
A thousand cannon  
Christened the Canal.

The steamers passed  
By the obelisk,  
In the language of my home  
Came to me the whisper of news :

The mirror-poem which I had polished  
For masculine minxes  
Was smeared at home  
By splutterings from penny whistles.

The poison-fly stung ;  
It made my memories loathsome.  
Stars, be thanked !—  
My home is what is ancient !  
We hailed the frigate  
From the roof of the river-boat ;  
I waved my hat,  
And greeted the flag.

## CHAPTER V.

### REST AND RETROSPECTION. 1870-1877.

WHILE Ibsen was writing the three plays last discussed, his position as a writer had materially altered. The general recognition for which he had so long waited was now universally accorded him. *Brand* at once made him famous; edition after edition was called for, and as he had found in the head of the firm of Gyldendal a publisher who carried on his business on a more extensive scale than his Norwegian competitors would at that time venture on, Ibsen was soon free from any pressing difficulties. Added to this, the Storting had, in 1866, at last allowed him an author's pension, for which he had vainly petitioned the previous Parliament. Not that he achieved it without difficulty even now. This time it was Councillor Riddervold who would not agree to it, saying that as a representative of the Church he could not favour such a bounty to the man who had written "The Comedy of Love," and who had, especially in Pastor Straamand, dealt so severely with the clergy of Norway. A Danish biography<sup>1</sup> tells us that hereupon Björn-

<sup>1</sup> *Dansk Illustreret Tidende*, 1867, Nos. 383-4.

son waited on the Councillor to bring him to reason, but without success. Some of Ibsen's old friends then took the matter in hand, and they were more fortunate. The petition was granted, and the pension was voted with only four dissentient voices in the Storting.

When Ibsen had quitted Norway he intended to return; his post as artistic adviser at the Christiania theatre had not been filled up, and awaited him yet. But when once he was out of the country he felt that he could never live there again.<sup>1</sup> His pension, and improved payment for his works, enabled him to remain abroad. He merely removed his residence from Rome to Dresden. In the summer of 1869 he visited Stockholm; the summer after he went to Copenhagen, and in both capitals he was received with the greatest distinction. Even in Norway a softer wind was blowing for him. Thus, when he went home in the summer of 1874—after staying for some little time at Vienna, where, in 1873, he was chosen to adjudicate the prizes for

<sup>1</sup> It would seem, however, that at a later period he seriously considered the possibility of returning to Norway to stay some time, if not to settle; Halvorsen mentions this, and it is made certain by a petition addressed to the ecclesiastical authorities of Christiania from Dresden, dated February 24, 1872, in which he says, "I had thought of making my way homeward this year, but a new poem of some length makes it impossible. [This was *Kejser og Galilæer*.] The agitation of mind which is necessarily involved in a change of residence from town to town, and in settling among surroundings which, after an absence of more than eight years, have in many respects become strange to me, would undoubtedly leave disfiguring marks on an unfinished work which needs to be cast and worked up to a certain point from the same original impulse."—*Norske Forfatterleksikon*, art. Ibsen.



Norwegian and Danish painting and sculpture—after an absence of ten years, for a visit of some months, he was entertained with numerous marks of respect; although, as Halvorsen tells us, his stay there was entirely of a private character. When he appeared at the theatre to see a performance of “The Young Men’s League,” the whole house joined in applauding him. At last he had won the recognition he deserved. On the afternoon of the 18th of September the students got up a procession in his honour, and it was on this occasion that, in reply to the addresses and songs of the students, he made the following memorable autobiographical speech to the assembly :—

“Gentlemen, finding, during my last year’s residence abroad, that I felt more clearly as time went on the necessity for seeing my native land once more, I at last determined—with much uneasiness and hesitation, I must frankly own—to set out on my homeward journey. My stay here was to be but a short one, but still, however brief, it might be long enough to destroy the illusion in which I would fain be able to live.

“I asked myself: ‘In what temper will my fellow-countrymen receive me?’ The honourable reception accorded to my works could not entirely reassure me, for the question in my mind still was this: ‘What is my personal position with regard to my fellow-countrymen?’ Nor can it be denied that misunderstandings had been rife. So far as I under-

stand the matter, two charges had been brought against me. It was thought that I saw my native land through the medium of unqualified bitterness as to my private and personal concerns, and that I was supposed to have prepared serious attacks on certain features in the life of the nation which, in the opinion of many persons, were worthy of better treatment than being held up to ridicule.

"I cannot make a better use of so happy and joyful an occasion as this, than by offering an explanation and making a confession.

"I have never made my private concerns of any kind the subject of a literary work. These private facts and feelings seemed to me in earlier and harder times less important than I have since very often been able to understand. When the eider-duck's nest had been plundered once, twice, thrice, it had been robbed of many illusions and great hopes in life. Now what is poetry—poem-writing? It was not till late in life that my eyes were opened to perceive that to be a poet is in fact to be a seer; but, note this, so to see that the thing seen is set before the public as the poet saw it. Now only what is part of our experience can be thus seen and assimilated. And this experience is the secret of the poetry of the new times. Everything that I have written during the last ten years is part of my intellectual experience. No writer goes through his experience alone. What he has known in life his fellow-countrymen have known too.

“And what is this that I have lived through and written about? It is a wide realm. In part I have written of things which have come to me in a flash, in my best hours, as being great and beautiful, and which have stirred me with living power. I have written about that which has seemed to me high above my everyday self, and I have written about it in order to give it substance outside me and within me. But I have also written about the very opposite; about that which, in my introspective moods, has come to light as the scum or the sediment of my own nature. In such cases writing poetry has served me as a bath, from which I have felt myself emerge cleaner, healthier, and freer.

“Ay, gentlemen, no one can give a written presentment of anything of which he does not to a certain degree, or at any rate at certain times, bear the image in himself. And where among us all is the man who has not, at some time, felt and confessed the antagonism of word and deed, of will and duty, of conduct and doctrine? Or which of us has not, at least once in his life, felt himself egotistically sufficient to himself, and has not, half doubtfully and half in good faith, excused himself for such demeanour, to others and to himself.

“I believe when I say this to you that I am saying it to the right address, for you students have, in its essence, the same task as the poet, that of achieving clearness for yourselves and for others on the temporal and eternal questions which

seethe in the times and in the society to which you belong.

"In this sense I may truly say of myself that, during my absence, I have endeavoured to be a faithful student. A poet is by nature gifted with long sight. I never gazed so fully or so keenly at my home and its stirring life as I have done from a distance and during my exile.

"And now, my dear young countrymen, a few words in conclusion, which also are connected with past experience. When the Emperor Julian stood at the end of his mortal career, and all around him was crumbling into ruin, nothing so crushed his spirit as the thought that all that was left to him was the respectful memory in which he was held by certain wise and shrewd heads, while his adversary was rich in the regard of warm and loving human hearts. This trait is the outcome of a past experience having its origin in a question which I occasionally asked myself in my loneliness in a foreign land. And to-day the youth of Norway has gathered round me and given me the answer in word and song, and with such full-hearted warmth as I had never expected to meet. I shall take this answer away with me as the richest gift of my visit to my countrymen at home; and it is my hope and belief that what I have experienced this evening will, by-and-by, find its reflection in a future work. And if it should be so, if I should some day send such a work here to my home, I beg the students to accept it as a grasp

of the hand and a thank-offering for this meeting ; and I beg you to regard yourselves as sharers in the gift."<sup>1</sup>

Under these altered circumstances Ibsen felt himself prompted to give some account of his literary labours up to this time. After dealing blow after blow to his native land, in *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, and the "Young Men's League," there had come a time of rest and retrospect. He took up no new work, but devoted himself to looking over his earlier pieces. Even the one new play which he brought out at this time, *Kejser og Galilæer*, was only the final development of a plan which had occupied him so long ago as when he first arrived at Rome. The Norwegian editions of his earlier works had by degrees been sold out ; the point to be decided was how much of his youthful poetry he should lay before the larger circle of readers he now could boast of. His stern self-criticism naturally did not play him false on this occasion. Three of his early dramatic pieces and a quantity of juvenile poems were excluded ; the "Feasting at Solhaug" was withheld from publication for some years longer, and *Catilina* and the "Lady of Östraat" were carefully revised as to details of style.

The drama, in two parts, *Kejser og Galilæer* (Emperor and Galilean), is Ibsen's longest effort ;

<sup>1</sup> Ibsen had prepared his speech, and Halvorsen printed it from the poet's MS.

each part separately is as long as any other of his plays. *Cæsar's Frafald* (Cæsar's Apostasy) is as long as *Kongsemnerne*, and *Kejser Julian* (The Emperor Julian) contains as many lines as *Brand*. The original scheme was merely for an ordinary historical play, with Julian as protagonist; but this plan expanded by degrees, especially after Ibsen had seriously taken it in hand in 1872 (or, as Halvorsen tells us, so early as 1871). Fresh materials had accumulated round the old, new points of view and new poetical ideas had grown up in his mind, and so by degrees the whole drama assumed its present vast proportions. It will some day be an interesting task in literary research to separate the various strata of material, and trace the origin of each, and the evolution of the plan.

"Emperor and Galilean" holds a remarkable position in Ibsen's poetical labours. It is his last historical drama, and stands with all its mysticism between two such modern studies of real life as "The Young Men's League" and "The Pillars of Society" (*Samfundets Støtter*). But it fills a yet more remarkable place in the development of Ibsen's views of life.

As has already been pointed out, the notion of a "Call" plays an important part in Ibsen's historical dramas, with some minor exceptions. In *Kongsemnerne*, for instance, the question of Call or No-call is practically the only question on which the piece turns. In that case the Call was regarded



as a happy gift from Heaven, falling on the elect person exactly as the apple dropped into Aladdin's turban. In *Brand* the idea of the Call was different; but it was none the less mystical. It was the Categorical Imperative, as it were, imposed on man, whose duty it is to be "The tablet on which God may write." In *Peer Gynt* the Call was defined as "to be your Self;" but this definition again was not so free from mysticism as might be supposed. It is possible to be yourself in two senses:—

You know, that in Paris there has lately been discovered a way of making portraits by help of the sun. Either direct pictures can be given, or else what are called negatives. The latter are reversed in light and shadow, and seem ugly to ordinary eyes: but there remains concealed in them also a resemblance, and the only thing requisite is to bring it out.

It is this last aspect of the case which in "Emperor and Galilean" is set before us in a new light; it here assumes a fatalist character. The Call is neither a gift from Heaven, nor the Categorical Imperative; it is necessity. It is no longer "Thou shalt," but "Thou must." Will is coerced will.

Julian's Call is to found an Empire, and the Empire he is to found is that of the Galilean. The will that rules the universe has chosen him, and so far he is under compulsion. But he has the option of founding the kingdom by positive or negative means. Even as a child he had a wonderful gift of winning

hearts to the Galilean; he would address his companions from the grave of martyrs, and convert them to Christianity. But at a later stage he misinterprets his destiny; he conceives of the Empire as being that of this world, the dominion of Cæsar, not of the Galilean; and so it falls out that he fights a battle for life or death against the Empire he was to have founded. Nevertheless he must perform his task; the oppression and persecutions inflicted by him on the Christians are exactly what arouse them from their lethargy and apathy; even those who had been feeble and faint-hearted find courage and enthusiasm to confess Christianity and suffer for the faith. Thus, when Julian dies at the end, he has fulfilled his destiny of establishing Christianity, since he leaves a compact and united body of believers, where, before, indifference and dissension had prevailed. Here, as we see, both mysticism and fatalism are involved in the idea of a Call; and to this extent *Kejser og Galilæer* constitutes a final statement; this fatalism never is found again in Ibsen's work, and the mysticism gives way to a pure naturalistic conception of a Call. It had in fact already disappeared from Ibsen's next previous work, an additional proof that the scheme of this drama belongs to an earlier date. In "The Young Men's League" the mystical aspect of a Call is treated as a hollow form of words. Stensgaard believes as firmly in his call as Haakon does (in "Rivals for the Throne"), and is no less convinced

of his personal alliance with Providence : " And so God be with you," says he. " Yes, God ; for it is his work that we are accomplishing by our youthful trusting deed. So now to the refreshment tent ! We will found our League in this very hour." What had before been sublime is here turned to a ridiculous bombast.

In Ibsen's process of thought self-sacrifice is intimately bound up with this notion of a Call. Self-sacrifice is demanded of the Elect ; he must make a sacrifice of self-interest, and thus *to be yourself* is the antithesis of *to be sufficient to yourself*, that is to say, it is to kill Self. In the abnegation of self-government, in the devotion of brotherly love, lies the highest task of humanity ; indeed, Ibsen goes so far beyond this stage of evolution, that he glorifies the sacrifice for its own sake. This is very conspicuous even in *Brand*, and is seen again in the glorification of the Martyrs' passion, in " Emperor and Galilean." From the modern point of moral purview the Martyr is only admirable when he sacrifices himself for the good of others ; but in Ibsen's eyes, on the contrary, the purifying and sublimating power of the sacrifice is so great that it is precious in itself. When the Christians in *Kejser Julian* gash their own flesh and tear open the wounds with their own hands to fling pieces at the Emperor's feet, it is not to him an evidence of the pitch of madness to which fanaticism can carry a man ; it shows the measure of the depth and

strength of enthusiasm to which faith can rise. It proves that this faith, at this moment in history, had life and right on its side. That such a view of life as that for which Julian is fighting is but a survival, is amply proved by the fact that it cannot produce a single martyr; for a cause for which no one will sacrifice his all is historically doomed to death. Thus, in this respect also *Kejser og Galilæer* stands on the sublimest heights to which Ibsen's idealism has ever mounted. In his later works his views are moderate and practical enough, even when sacrifice is under discussion.

In point of style "Emperor and Galilean" does not take such high rank among Ibsen's works. As we read it we get an impression that the long time which elapsed between the inception of the work and its ultimate execution resulted in a want of homogeneous unity in the moulding of the vast materials. Thus we forthwith discover that Julian in *Cæsar's Frafald* (Cæsar's Apostasy) is a far more significant and interesting figure than he is in *Kejser Julian* (The Emperor Julian). It must be admitted indeed that all the characteristics he displays as Emperor are indicated in his childhood and youth; but what surprises us is that his weak side should so suddenly predominate as soon as he is on the throne. In "Cæsar's Apostasy" Julian entirely commands the reader's sympathy. His is from the first a genuine nature, honestly seeking the truth, and striving for full and complete life; but instead

of life, books are set before him, and instead of the truth, fine words. He is just a little vain too, and has an early-developed gift of dissimulation; but we are ready to forgive him these defects in consideration of his difficult position; even when he contrives by crafty means to be hailed as Emperor, he does not lose much of our good-will, for he only does it in necessary self-defence. As general of the forces in Gaul he has displayed admirable skill, energy, and valour in action; and when at last he tears himself from the Galileans it is simply because he is weary of the hypocrisy, bad faith, and meanness, which he finds among the Christians.

But in the second part, as Emperor, Julian is suddenly transformed; he who had longed for an active life now gives himself up to repose and to books; from a man of action he has become a vain literary pedant, seeing only the outward form and never reaching the inmost kernel; and when the citizens of Antioch laugh him to scorn they are in the right. He has lost the stamp of tragedy, and falls below his earlier standard never to rise to it again till quite the close. He ends like Catiline, Fru Inger, and Hjördis, being driven mad by his woeful fate, and then to death.

As the representative of the highest culture of his time, we would gladly think of Julian as a nobler figure than Ibsen has shown us; and this is true in an even greater degree of the rest of the figures in the piece, who have had that old typical training. It



may be that this culture was no more than a survival, doomed to crumble into dust; nevertheless, even in its decadence it had still power enough to produce nobler and grander individuality than that of Libanios and his peers. But here, as wherever else Ibsen has treated the historical struggle between the old and the new order, he is entirely on the side of the new. He takes up the same attitude in "Rivals for the Throne," and in the poem on the thousandth anniversary of Norway's freedom, where he glorifies Harald Haarfager's deed at the cost of the older freedom-loving magnates of the land.

In regard to actual writing, *Kejser og Galilæer* is an interesting attempt to bring the character of a period to bear even on the details of style. The author has tried to reproduce the involved manner of the later Classic Ages, with all its digressions and flowers of speech. The Latin, rather than the Greek construction, seems to have been his model. It is a style which lends great force to the historical colour of the piece.

That Ibsen's sense of style had developed itself in the course of years, and that his ideal had become modified, need not be said. We can, in fact, mark three distinct stages of its growth. In his younger poems, feeling is the stamp of his style. Then came a period, beginning with the writing of *Haermændene*, during which his chief endeavour was to give it a strictly national character. A small



but significant anecdote is told of him at this time. It happened that a sort of charity-bazaar was to be held in Christiania, at which *tableaux-vivants* were to be shown, and appropriate words spoken. Ibsen was requested to write the text for one of them. But when the performance was at hand Vilhelm Wiehe, who had been entrusted with its delivery, declared that he could not possibly speak it. The style and language were too decidedly Norwegian for a Danish actor to venture to pronounce the words in the presence of a Norwegian audience. Even Fru Gundersen, then Fröken Svendsen, declared that she should find some difficulty in delivering the poem. Although she had studied at Christiania, on the Norwegian stage, and her accent had been caught from the people among whom she lived, Ibsen's Norwegian struck her as too peculiar.

In his third and last stage of development Ibsen's law of style was perspicuity, and this he constantly kept in view when, soon after 1870, he undertook to revise the works of his youth. He found his emotional early style in part too free and in part too general. Consequently the work of revision consisted, to some extent, in giving vigour to the style, by greater brevity and compactness; partly in replacing the original phrases—too vague in some passages—by others more graphic.

When *Catilina* was republished, five-and-twenty years after its first appearance, as a sort of jubilee

edition, there were very few lines which had not undergone some alteration. As examples are better than description, we here reproduce a few of the passages already quoted from the second edition in their original form. The passage in which Catilina says that he aims at establishing civic freedom (*ante*, p. 31) originally stood thus :—

See freedom, freedom, will I recreate  
As pure as once in time long past it flourished  
Here and amongst us ; will recall the time  
When every Roman gladly sold his life  
To buy the honour of his fatherland,  
And gave up all that he might guard its glory.

Catilina's words, in which he wishes that, like a star, "he might blaze as he fell" (see *ante*, p. 34), stood thus in the first edition :—

Nay ! for a moment to shine out in splendour,  
And flame a blazing meteor through the sky—  
To consecrate my name by one high deed  
With great renown, with immortality,  
Ah ! I could lightly in the self-same hour  
Quit life—for then I should have lived indeed ;  
I could fly hence and win an alien shore,  
Nay, I could plunge the dagger in my heart.

And Furia's declamatory speech (see *ante*, p. 37) was as follows :—

And all this purposeless and empty action,  
A life as faint as any lamp's last flicker,  
Ah ! what a field to exercise this fulness  
Of high, proud hopes that, mounting in my bosom,

Are crushed together in between these walls,  
Where life grows stiff as death, and hope's extinguished,  
And where no object leads the brain's thought onward.

As may be seen, not only the construction but the style itself is firmer.

*Fru Inger til Östraat*, of which the second edition had appeared the year before, offers yet more remarkable instances of the difference between the style of Ibsen's youthful work and that of his mature manhood.

The portions which have undergone least alteration are Eline's famous scene with Nils Lykke, and Fru Inger's monologue in the fifth act. The part which has most variations is that of Nils Lykke. Especially is the long soliloquy in which he presents himself to the audience, in the second act, shortened to about half in the second edition; and not the part only, but the drama, is greatly improved in consequence.

Yet more ruthless is the way in which Ibsen has remodelled his lyric work. When we see the solitary small volume of "Poems" which he published in 1870, we are disposed to imagine that his efforts in lyric verse must have been but meagre. And yet in his younger days he wrote and published in periodical form such a large number of poems that, if they were all collected, several volumes might be compiled, each as large as this which he himself edited. As early as 1850 or 1851 he began to think of publishing a collection of his verses, and

the project proceeded so far that the first sheet was printed off; but then he changed his mind, and the editing was postponed year after year. It was not till thirty years later that he took the task up in earnest, and he then set to work in so stern a mood that, of all his lyric writings, only fifty-five were esteemed worthy to be included. Of the long poem originally published in "*Manden*," *En Lördagafte i Hardanger* (A Saturday Evening in Hardanger), only the fragment which now heads the collection under the title *Spillemænd* (Musicians) was retained, and even this was reduced from nine to four stanzas. The cycle of pieces before mentioned, *I Billedgalleriet* (In the Picture Gallery), consisting of twenty-three poems, was concentrated in the little poem *I Galleriet* (In the Gallery); and of the separate songs only one was retained, *Lysrød* (Fearing Light), while a few leading ideas were utilised for new poems.<sup>1</sup> In *Paa Akershus* four verses were struck out and six new ones written; *Byggeplaner* (Plans for Building) has but three stanzas instead of four; *Edderfuglen* (The Eider-Duck) seven instead of sixteen, and so forth.

And when we regard the details of the changes made, our sense of the severity of his self-criticism and the difference between his two styles is enhanced. Take, for instance, the first stanza of the

<sup>1</sup> *Min unge Vin* (My Young Wine); *En Svane* (A Swan); *Stambogsrim* (Lines for an Album).

poem *Paa Akershus* (At Akershus). The original form was as follows :—

Sommernatten har sit milde  
Slør henover jorden strækket,  
Taagedunkle stjerner spille  
Mat og sølverblegt bag dækket.

These “mist-darkened stars” which play “dim and silver-pale behind the veil,” did not satisfy Ibsen when he read the poem again; they do not accurately represent the mist and the individual stars which shine through it on a summer night; and after making a slight alteration in the first lines he entirely re-wrote the two last, so that the verse now stands thus :—

Sommernattens slør med milde  
Folder sig om jorden spænder;  
Enkle stjerner, store, stille,  
Blege bagom skodden brænder.

In this form the verse gives such a vivid picture of a summer night that the reader has it before his eyes. And as Ibsen did in this case, so he did all through. He replaced every word which was characteristic of the older poetical style, and which he therefore thought rather worn out, by new expressions of more picturesque effect, because they are more true to nature. Thus for *bølgen* (the waves, or waters) he wrote *fjorden* (the fjord); for *klippen* (cliff or rock), *bergvæggen* (the wedge of the mountain); for “find a way,” “force a way;” for “bright gold;” “red gold,” and so forth.

As a rule, these changes were merely verbal ; but in some cases the alterations were of a more radical character. In "The Eider-Duck," for instance, the revision is highly characteristic. In the first instance the Eider-Duck had been to Ibsen no more than a symbol of patience and fidelity. Man is not so enduring and faithful, for—

If it loses but once its secret treasure,  
Its soul is plunged into gloom beyond measure ;  
Its powers grow sickly, its spirit depressed,  
Till nothing is left but a bleeding breast.

All this disappears in the new version, and the Eider-Duck becomes to Ibsen the image of his own experience :—

But losing its third and its last delight,  
It stretches its wing through a long spring night.  
It cleaves the mist with a bleeding breast ;  
To the south ! to a coast by sunshine blest !

Not less characteristic is the alteration *Byggeplaner* (Plans for Building) has undergone. Of the greater and the lesser intention—to be an immortal poet and to win the love of a woman—this is the original conclusion :—

I thought a splendid harmony inspired the whole design,  
But discord in the drawing came, and line fell out with  
line;  
And just as I grew sensible, the whole grew crazy mad ;  
The great became so little, and the little—all I had.



In the alteration the last two lines ran thus :—

When the architect grew sensible, the mansion it grew mad,  
The main wing grew too puny, and the small wing fell  
down flat.

Such changes as were made in several other poems bear witness to all the experience which had given Ibsen his gloomy views of life, and made his mood more bitter as the years went on. Poems like *Mindets Magt* (The Power of Memory) and *Troens Grund* (The Basis of Faith), written in the early years of his life abroad, give it a loftier and more energetic utterance. The first, indeed, is a poetical testimony to his determination in Rome never to return to Norway.

Nevertheless, as time went on, he began to feel the necessity for seeing home once more. The first edition of his poems ended with these words :—

Towards the huts of the snow-land,  
From the woods of the south coast,  
There rideth a horseman  
Every single night.

And when in the following year he sent his great poem for the thousandth anniversary of the unity of Norway (*Ved Tusindaarsfesten*) to Christiania, he began it with these conciliatory sentiments :—

My countrymen, who filled for me deep bowls  
Of wholesome bitter medicine, such as gave  
The poet, on the margin of his grave,  
Fresh strength to fight where broken twilight rolls,—

My countrymen, who sped me o'er the wave,—  
An exile, with my griefs for pilgrim-soles,  
My fears for burdens, doubts for staff, to roam,—  
From the wide world I send you greeting home.

I send you thanks for gifts that help and harden,  
Thanks for each hour of purifying pain ;  
Each plant that prospers in my poet's garden  
Is rooted where your harshness poured its rain ;  
Each shoot in which it blooms and burgeons forth,  
It owes to that grey weather from the north ;  
The sun's fire loosens, but the fog secures !  
My country, thanks ! My life's best gifts were yours.

Nevertheless, there was much uneasiness and indecision to be overcome before he could make up his mind to visit Norway once more after ten years of absence. This he confessed in his address to the students. The favourable reception accorded to his books could not altogether relieve his mind, for there was still the question, "What is my personal position in the estimation of my fellow-countrymen?" The answer was given by the reception he met with, above all from the academic youth of Norway.

It was not alone anxiety as to this question which drew him homewards ; it was yet more the feeling that he was standing at a turning-point in his poetic career. The stride he had made in writing *De Unges Forbund* was but the first step on a new path. The period of historical and argumentative drama was ended ; the drama of daily life was pressing on his attention. And to be able to give

living pictures of the present, Ibsen felt the need for standing once more on Norwegian soil and breathing Norwegian air. His attitude towards reality was of such a nature, that he required no long stay in his native land; a short visit was sufficient; then he went back to reside abroad again, and, while keeping an observant eye on home affairs, through the medium of books and papers, he began that series of modern plays which have been the outcome of his poetic efforts during the last ten years, and have won for him European celebrity.

These dramas are too recent to be made the subject of literary history; and a general critical opinion would be foreign to the purpose of this book. We must therefore be content to work out one part only of the problem they present, namely, to throw what light we can on the underlying motives of these pieces, and on their artistic character.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *DRAMAS OF THE DAY (1877-1888).*

THE great historical events which marked the years between 1868-1871 had excited Ibsen's interest in the highest degree. During the Danish-German war he had discerned in the transactions of European politics that discrepancy between word and deed which he had gradually learnt to watch for with an eagerness that amounted to a passion. He cried out to the rulers of Europe :—

With vows forgotten, and pledges broken,  
With pages of treaties too torn to read,  
With denials this year of what last year was spoken,  
In the furrows of history you've sown seed.

He formed the impression that the times were rotten in which he lived, that a new epoch must surely be at hand ; and he took this occasion to institute a comparison with former great moral revolutions in Europe, and with the decline of the Roman Empire and the new developments which ensued, when everything was crashing to its fall, and the ruins of

Circus and palace,  
Temples, a forest of columns,  
Arches, arcades, all trampled to dust

Under the shod hoof of the buffalo.  
 Then was built anew on the foundation of the old,  
 And the air was pure for a time.  
 Now the auguries point to the hour of renovation ;  
 Now rises the pestilence from the spongy soil,  
 And puffs now hither, now thither.

(*Abraham Lincoln's Murder.*)

Or again he sought a parallel in the decay of ancient Egypt. In both cases the cause lay in the absence of individuality ; for, as he writes in *Ballonbrevet* (The Letter by Balloon) :—

Where the form is not imbued  
 With the personal to the core,  
 With hate, frenzy, joy in battle,  
 Beat of pulse and swing of blood,  
 All the pomp of life's no more  
 Than a skeleton's dry rattle.

Ibsen seems to have regarded the Franco-German war as an epoch-marking crisis which must result in a new phase of the ages. In *Ballonbrevet*, written in December 1870, he inquires, with express reference to the condition of the times :—

Lady ! shall we be invited ?  
 Wait ! who knows ? The post may bring  
 A card for us too. That's his ring ?

And in a letter to Georg Brandes, written in the same month, he gives even more emphatic utterance to these hopes in plain prose :—

“ Public events absorb a great part of my thoughts.

The old, illusory France is broken into fragments. If now this new and very real Prussia might also be broken up, at one leap we should find ourselves in an entirely new epoch. Hey! what a row the ideas all about us would make. And high time too! Ah! what we live on now-a-days is no more than the crumbs fallen from the table of the revolution of the last century, and we have chewed those morsels long enough. Those notions demand fresh material and fresh elucidation. Liberty, equality and fraternity have no longer the same meaning as in the days of the late-lamented Guillotine. But this is what politicians will not see, and for that I hate them. Men want only partial revolutions, revolutions in externals, in politics. But this is mere trifling. What we really need is a revolution in the spirit of man."

What Ibsen looked for from the new epoch was a state of society in which the individual might develop wholly and freely, without being fettered by society or the State. In another letter to Georg Brandes, written a few months later, he says:—

"The State is the curse of the individual. What has been the price of Prussia's strength as a State? The absorption of the individual in the political and geographical entity. The waiter is the best soldier. Away with the State! When that revolution is accomplished I will be there: Undermine the notion of the State, let free will and spiritual affinity be



the only recognised basis of union, and you will have the beginnings of a liberty worthy of the name."

This notion: that the State is the foe of the individual, and must therefore be done away with, is a favourite idea with Ibsen. Sixteen years later I heard him expatiate on it with as much fervour and zeal as when he first put it forward; and it is, in fact, one of the pregnant thoughts of our day, destined, yet, perhaps, to play a great part in the future. Even so ardent a supporter of the State as a theory, as Herbert Spencer, admits in one of his essays that we are approaching a constitution of society in which government will be restricted within the narrowest possible limits, and freedom raised to the highest possible power. In point of fact, they were closely allied notions which, soon after this, were proclaimed by the Paris Commune. In a later letter to Brandes Ibsen bewails:—

"Is it not base of the Commune in Paris to give in, and spoil my admirable theory of the State—or rather of the No State? The idea is now nipped and crushed for a long time to come, and I can no longer even revive the subject in verse with any decency. Still, it has a sound kernel in it, that I plainly see, and it will yet be realised some day without any distortion."

The Paris Commune and the inevitable reaction were a disappointment to Ibsen. Like Maximos, in "Emperor and Galilean," he believed that the

"Third Empire" was at hand; and, like him, he had discovered his mistake: the time was not ripe. There can be no doubt that such political convictions as these led him to conceive of this singular figure of a Mystic.

As long as Ibsen believed that the new order of things was so near, he had preserved a dignified and expectant attitude:—

Until *then* I shut myself into my room,  
Pace about there with kid gloves on;  
Until *then* I fence myself around,  
Delicately inscribe my verses upon vellum.

But as soon as he saw that the "Steamship Europe" on her voyage to new lands carried on board the corpse of the past as ballast, and that she would continue to do so, being still so far from the haven of her voyage—as soon as he saw this, he forsook this expectant attitude and began a diagnosis of the diseases of modern society. The outcome of this study is known to us in the series of society dramas, beginning with "The Pillars of Society" (*Samfundets Stötter*), and closing—provisionally—with "The Lady of the Sea" (*Fruen fra Havet*).

The Russian writer and anarchist, Prince Krapotkin, not long since, in an essay in the *Nineteenth Century*, characterised the hypocrisy of modern society in these terms:—"Our moral maxims say, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;' but if a child should act upon this, and take off his

jacket to give to a poor unknown child, his mother would tell him that the saying was not to be thus interpreted; that if he were to live by this rule he would soon go barefoot, and without having relieved the misery about him. This injunction is good to repeat, but not to practise. Our preachers say, 'To work is to pray;' but every one does his best to make others work for him. We are told we are not to lie; but politics are one huge lie. And we accustom ourselves and our children to live by this double-faced morality, which is sheer hypocrisy, and to defend the hypocrisy by sophistry. Hypocrisy and sophistry lie at the foundation of our life. But society cannot subsist on such morality. Things cannot continue like this; there must, there will, be a change."

It is a perfectly similar notion of modern society which lies at the foundation of Ibsen's recent plays, and it is this very social hypocrisy that he deals with. Not blunderers like Peer Gynt, nor fortune-hunters like Stensgaard, are now his theme; on the contrary, bright examples of men in society. He makes them so very superior, and fits them out with so many privileges, that they pass in the opinion of the world as really being men of honour; and then, bit by bit, he strips them of their society finery till their native self-seeking is left in all its nakedness.

Consul Bernick leads the way. He is the most important and most respected man in the town, a

merchant on a grand scale, a man who is always foremost in any undertaking of general utility; the great benefactor of his native place—one of the true pillars of its society. And yet self-interest and greed lie behind everything he does. When he makes gifts to the town, he does it to gain power and influence; and when he undertakes the affairs of the railway, it is because it will be an advantage to him if the line is made. But he dares not frankly and honestly confess his motives, out of consideration for his neighbours. Society insists on high-sounding words, so he and all the other persons in the piece use big words to lend a grace to their small dealings. But there is also a special type of social hypocrisy in Norway which Ibsen has here attacked, and which, at the time when this play was written, had just reached its height.

Historical events in Europe had not in fact made the same impression on Norwegian society as on Ibsen. The feeling there was almost terror. People read in the Norwegian papers of the horrors of the Paris Commune, with dark hints as to a secret society calling itself "International," whose aim it was to consign all modern culture to the flames. And at the same time they read of all the extravagant "tendencies" which were diffusing themselves throughout the Continent, and were told that some of the worst were already knocking at their own door. But here, happily, they could find no congenial soil; here peace reigned and there could be no danger, for our little Norwegian

society, God be praised, rested on a firmer moral foundation than the greater society over there. This great society was regarded in general as rotten to the very ground; Norwegian society, on the other hand, was still healthy, and its health must be preserved by exclusive measures, and by establishing a sort of moral *cordon* against the infection of the plague of modern ideas. Our special moral superiority at that time was one of the peculiarly Norwegian articles of faith, such as always prevail in a small country which has for a long period closed its ports against the introduction of the movement towards the higher culture of greater lands.

This is precisely the form of social hypocrisy at which Ibsen deals a home-thrust in "The Pillars of Society." He is of opinion that the main difference between a great and a small polity is that there is more lying and concealment in the small than in the large one. The smaller the community, the more considerations fetter the individual members, and the more impediments there are in the way of personal action; and at the same time the less important are their proceedings generally, while the same sins and crimes are rife, under the shelter of social morality. Bernick, who in the first moment is so indignant with the American ship-owners for sending out a ship that is not seaworthy, is at last driven, out of consideration for his position in society, to be guilty of the same crime.

When the piece came out the particular phase of

hypocrisy which the poet was assailing of course had an answer ready at once. The critics declared that the picture drawn by Ibsen had no resemblance to the truth; that he knew nothing of Norwegian manners; that Norwegian society was not like the notion of it invented by Ibsen far away at Munich; that it was far more honourable and better than that of the great world. But in the ten years which have elapsed since these events, facts have proved so entirely in favour of the poet and against the critics that this form of hypocrisy no longer dares to show itself.

In "The Pillars of Society" we are shown what men are from a social stand-point; but in Consul Bernick's conduct to his wife we have an anticipatory hint for a study of the man of society as a husband. This study was worked out into *Et Dukkehjem* (A Doll's House). Here again Ibsen makes every concession to the man whose selfishness he proposes to unveil. Helmer, the lawyer, is a man who may be regarded as an honour to society. In his outward conduct he is a model of virtue, and a man of æsthetic instincts with highly cultivated tastes. He has the most vehement aversion for everything approaching to untruth or dishonour, and his notions of honesty in money-matters are so strict that he will not accept a loan, simply because he might conceivably die the next day and so be prevented from repaying the debt. So far the writer makes him out as better than most



other men. But what a coarse vein of self-love lies under this fair exterior. How rough and selfish he is to his wife, not only when the fearful discovery of her deceit bursts upon him, but even before, in their daily life together. She is to live only for him, think only of him, feel and believe only what he feels and believes.

No other of Ibsen's dramas has called forth such endless, tedious discussions as "*A Doll's House*;" it positively gave rise to a complete literature of argument for and against it—not in Norway only, but in Denmark and Sweden; nay, in Sweden it has given rise to a school of dramatic writing which treats similar subjects in Ibsen's manner—some indeed after a fashion which has a distinct touch of caricature.

The thing which gave "*A Doll's House*" this pre-eminence over Ibsen's other works is the circumstance that in it the author, for the first time, put forward his demand for individual development on behalf of woman. Women, too, ought to be themselves independent human beings; not merely the wives of their husbands and the mothers of their children.

"Before all else you are a wife and a mother," says Helmer.

"That I no longer believe," replies Nora. "I think that before all else I am a human being, I, as much as you. At least I will try to become one."

Till now Ibsen had left women out of count in this respect; he had depicted individual, headstrong

exceptions, but, on the whole he had shown woman only as enthusiastic for the achievements of man ; her great and admirable peculiarity was that she was ready to sacrifice everything for the man she loved. This was what he had shown us in Aurelia (in *Catilina*), in Eline (in *Fru Inger*), in Margretha, Ragnhild, and Ingebjörg (in *Kongsemnerne*), in Agnes, Brand's wife ; in Solvejg (*Peer Gynt*), in Mrs. Bernick, Miss Bernick, and Lona Hessel (*Pillars of Society*). Nay, even Hjördis would have been such a woman if Sigurd had been her husband instead of Gunnar. And where it is not to their husbands that they sacrifice themselves, it is to their sons. What is it that twines the red thread with Dame Inger's life, but her son ? What makes Aase attractive in spite of everything, but her love for her son ? And what is Inga fra Varteig, in *Kongsemnerne*, but simply the mother of "the King—her great son." Love is the essence of woman ; love which will sacrifice all without looking for a return. Thus, in the early editions of *Kongsemnerne* a truly Ibsen-like phrase says : "To love, to sacrifice everything and be forgotten—that is woman's saga," and for this reason Ibsen always sets women in radiant poetic contrast to the egoism of men ; everything lyric, all the repressed emotional feeling, of which he can make no use in his presentment of men, he lavishes on a glory to set round the heads of his women. His descriptions of these women constitute the tenderest and most melting passages of his poetry. Nothing can be

more sweet and touching than Eline's love, or Margretha's; nothing deeper or more fervent than the scene in the fourth act of *Brand*, where Agnes gives herself up to thinking of her little dead son. Thus Ibsen is above all other things the chivalrous poet of women; and even if he does not wholly agree with Bernick, he gives him his approval when he makes him exclaim, "You women are the pillars of society."

But the whole drift of his principles could not fail to lead him to apply the same standard to women as to men, and then their capacity for losing themselves in others could no longer be to him their highest function.

It has been pointed out that the germ of "A Doll's House" is to be found in Selma's outburst in the fourth act of "The Young Men's League;" and this is perfectly true; but the first germ of all is in fact older still. In one of the scenes where Peer Gynt is making love to Anitra he says:—

I will rivet thy desires,  
 Captivate thy wandering fires;  
 Thou shalt breathe for me alone;  
 I am what my girl admires,  
 Gold and jewels, all her own.  
 Life is blank if we are parted,—  
 Blank to thee, that is, remember!  
 In this contract we have started,  
 To thy being's lowest ember,  
 Every inch and thread of thee  
 I must know is filled with me.

. . . . .

Therefore it is well that just  
 Empty is thy skull's formation ;  
 If one has a soul, one must  
 Spare some time to contemplation ;  
 While these hours in thought I measure,  
 If thou wilt, then shalt, my treasure,  
 Wear an anklet round thy ankle.  
 'Twill be best for both, I trow ;  
 I will deal with thoughts that rankle,  
 Thou'lt preserve—the status quo.

These lines contain the direct prototype of the portrait of Helmer ; but indirectly, as preparatory to the satire on Helmer, they also point to the views which led Ibsen, in "*A Doll's House*," to work out the claims of women to individuality. Still, in accordance with Ibsen's whole conception of women, this claim, as addressed to men, does not take the form of a bitter accusation on the score of neglected duties, but that of an affectionate appeal.

At first Nora is a thorough woman on Ibsen's earlier pattern. She does not ask to be anything for her own sake, but like her predecessors in Ibsen's dramas, has an unlimited instinct of self-sacrifice. She has no intention of committing forgery ; she aims only at sparing her invalid father and saving her husband's life, so she is finally convinced that her deed is praiseworthy. When she learns that it is regarded as a crime she cannot believe it ; and even when she is convinced, she would do it again gladly if circumstances should again make it desirable. When Helmer says : "No man sacrifices

his honour, even for one he loves," she speaks in the name of all Ibsen's women, and stands forth as the representative of his idea of a woman, when she exclaims: "Hundreds of thousands of women have done so."

When, in the preface to the first part of *Giftas* (Married), the Swedish novelist August Strindberg takes the field against this answer, and speaks of it as a sort of chivalrous fencing parry, his argument rests on a defective apprehension of one of the most characteristic features of Ibsen's dramas.

But such unlimited devotion involves great peril for the individuality of the devotee, especially in the case of marriage with a man like Helmer. In such an union Nora cannot live the life of a human being, but only that of a doll; Helmer's ideal of a wife is very like Peer Gynt's ideal of a mistress; for while Peer Gynt desires to take the place in Anitra of her own soul, Helmer desires to be Nora's will and conscience. She lives in a condition of legal infancy; she thinks like a child, and allows herself to be treated as a child; so long as she is full of unbounded admiration for her husband and trusts him unconditionally, everything goes on well in its way; but on the day when the confidence is destroyed, on the day when she discerns what the man really is for whom she has sacrificed so much—on that day there is division in her soul. Either she must give up herself, her identity, or she must take it back. Ibsen, as is well-known, chooses the latter

course ; he makes her break the degrading bonds of such a marriage, exactly as in the earlier play he makes his ideal personages break the bonds in which society has fettered them. Just as he then pointed out the dangers to the individual which lie beneath society, so he here discovers similar perils beneath marriage, and ends by breaking his staff over the whole class of married lives in which the husband is everything and the wife nothing.

The close of "A Doll's House" gave rise to much dissentient criticism ; long columns were written against it, and the upshot of all this writing was that it was pronounced immoral.

Ibsen naturally regarded the matter in a different light ; to him it was far more immoral to continue to live together under such conditions. "But the children !" people asked ; "what is to become of them ? Is it not inexcusable in a mother to abandon her children ?" "Well, the children ; do you suppose it would be any better for them if such a married life were to subsist ?" replied Ibsen, with another question.

This question was embodied in *Gengangere* (Ghosts). This play and "A Doll's House" in a certain sense complete and supplement each other. Supposing that Nora, after quitting her husband's house, had returned next day—supposing that the man were not merely coarse-minded and ignoble, but licentious and vulgar—supposing that they had as yet no family, but that children were born to them



after their reunion—we have the circumstances which differentiate Nora Helmer and Helena Alving. Helena, like Nora, had fled from her husband, who, like Helmer, is miserable at her departure. She takes refuge under the roof of Pastor Manders; but this typical representative of public opinion persuades her to return to Alving, libertine as he is, and enfeebled in mind and body, and he resumes his old life with her as though nothing had happened. What will come of it?

The answer is to this effect: The wife's ineffectual attempt at escape has crushed her independence; she no longer dares to do or to leave undone the things she herself believes to be right or wrong; she fears to come into collision with the ideas and views of others. And seeing that she, the runaway wife, will be held accountable for her husband's aberrations as soon as they are known, she does all she can to hide his life from the eyes of the world. She becomes a victim of the universal hypocrisy. She must send away her little son as soon as he is of an age to begin to apprehend the true state of affairs. To understand them too early will be fatal to him, so he must go, however painful and otherwise mischievous it may be. It is for the child's benefit that she continues to live this life; but the benefit, after all, is not great. Alving continues his life of debauchery, and she, in fear and anguish, struggles to preserve his good name because every stain on it will lie doubly black on hers. Even

after his death she tries to protect his reputation, concealing his misdeeds and respecting his memory ; and to this end, she founds a hospital.

But through all these efforts, prompted by her slavish dread of society, she is aware of a craving to rebel against the power whose slave she is. Her meditations gradually convince her of the hollowness of all the conditions which society holds up to admiration as sacred and noble in themselves, but which she knows only under a contemptible and distorted aspect. The relations between husband and wife, brother and sister, father and son, appear to her mind, trained by bitter experience, as no more than empty formulas, pleasing figures of speech, which once, no doubt, wore a nimbus, so to speak, but have preserved it only as a result of that human weakness which Andersen described in "The Emperor's New Clothes."

And then, at last, the son comes home and makes use of his experience of life to demonstrate the hollowness of the relation between mother and son, the only tie which had escaped her criticism. But above all, the results of her return to her husband have not been eradicated. Oswald still suffers from disease inherited from his father ; and the relations of Oswald to Regine suggest an abyss of possibility.

To this lead the ordinary notions of life ; this is the outcome of those commonplace views which hover about us like soulless ghosts. Lift the curtain,

tear away the hypocrisies which cover the surface, and self-interest grins at us ; not only in such natures as those of Regine or the carpenter Engstrand, but even in so respectable and thick-skinned a member of society as Pastor Manders.

In no other work has Ibsen dissected social morality so completely or so extensively. He knew how superficial the morality must be which led people to regard the close of "A Doll's House" as worthy of reprobation ; how much depravity and baseness, cowardliness and hypocrisy, it must cover. He knew on what insecure foundations society rests. Society's morals were to him one vast bog ; only the very lightest creatures could cross it without becoming aware that there was no solid ground under foot, and any one whose ill-fortune it was to break through the surface found that the deeper he went the more rotten was the soil. Then, in his terror, he would struggle to recover his footing, but found none. Nay, it was worse than a bog ; it was as though the very ground on which he stood sank beneath his feet, and was suddenly swallowed up in the yawning sea.

This was the impression produced on the first appearance of "Ghosts." Its tremendous effect was not merely the result of tragic grandeur, which was all the more impressive for being taken directly from contemporary life—its terrors lay in the boldness and weightiness of its principles. Even Ibsen's friends, who had watched him step by step from

drama to drama, started back at the first shock from the abyss he opened at their feet, and tried to save themselves by flight. The general public and their representatives in the press raised a howl of fury such as had not been heard since the first performance of the "Comedy of Love;" and now in 1881, as then in 1862, the author himself was publicly and privately attacked, and bespattered with all the foul commonplace which the mob has always in reserve when it desires to discount the effects of some work of daring and noble genius. The eruption of this mud-volcano affords no edifying spectacle; but nothing in fact was better fitted to make the piece widely known and understood than the evidence thus afforded of its truth.

That Ibsen was incensed by this reception of his piece need not be said. In a shorter time than usual he had another play finished, and this was his self-defence and answer.

Dr. Tomas Stockmann, in *En Folkefiende* (An Enemy of Society), is in the same predicament as Ibsen. He has not indeed attempted to show that the ordinary ethics of married life flow from an unwholesome source, but he has done something quite analogous: he has pointed out the unhealthy state of the baths in his native town. This rouses opposition, and he is at once deserted; indignation spreads, no one will listen to him. The situation is precisely that of Ibsen just after the production of "Ghosts." He makes his hero discover that

society is contemptible and base, and Stockmann, of course, speaks his mind, and tells society the truth : It is no disgrace to be persecuted by society ; on the contrary, it is an honour which every soul above the common should seek. Far from crushing those it assails with such weapons, it makes them stronger ; for the man who finds himself in agreement with society is but a weak creature, an insignificant individual, bound hand and foot by its traditions and customs. No, "the strongest man is he who stands most alone."

The mode of attack here adopted is both new and interesting. It is not warfare carried on from a safe shelter ; it is a direct attack all along the line, as daring as possible ; a charge in the open, without any regard as to whether the line of advance offers any uncovered points, even when the storming body of ideas may reasonably fear an attack from the rear.

Equally new and interesting is it to see that he here takes the field in the name of freedom against liberal opinions and the tyranny of the majority. Which is in the right—genius or society, the majority or the one ? "The majority always has right on its side as well as truth," reply the representatives of the majority, Hovstad and Billing. "The majority never has right on its side, never, I say," replies the Doctor. "Who constitute the majority of the inhabitants of any country—the wise or the fools?—And it can never be right that the

fools should govern the wise. The majority have the might, more's the pity—but they have not the right. The right is with me, and a few, a very few, others, those who have assimilated the young, germinating truths which are still too newly-born into the world of consciousness to have won a majority." "These men stand, as it were, outside the camp, among the pioneers who have pushed so far ahead that the 'compact majority' have not yet been able to catch them up."

From the point of view of art, *En Folkefeinde* is not one of Ibsen's most successful works. It is impossible to defend the way in which, in the third act, the allegory of the conduit is introduced to lead up to an attack on society; the transition from the image to the thing it represents has somewhat the effect of a complete change of subject. But this very lack of art is highly characteristic, as showing the vehement indignation which gave rise to the piece. So great was his wrath that the drama did not afford it space enough; it broke out of bounds and found a second channel, exactly as in spring-time a river bursts the dam.

The psychological treatment shows all Ibsen's usual mastery; although Stockmann's position is so like his own, he has studied him objectively, so completely from outside, that the piece may be regarded as a masterpiece of modern psychology. Stockmann is as full of individuality as the most arrant *naturalist* can desire, and his evolution re-



markable at every stage. At first it seems a little difficult to understand how a man who is so simple in the first act can express himself as Stockmann does in the fourth. But on closer examination this is not strange. It is exactly because he is so simple that the insight he suddenly gets into the state of society has such a violent effect; for that very reason he takes the healthy view of the whole matter without which he could not act as he does. It is a brilliant stroke, too, when Ibsen makes him come forward so boldly; for it is precisely because he pays no heed to trifles that he finds it easy to set aside all petty considerations and fix his attention solely on the main point. He is a quite new and original type among Ibsen's creations, though his development follows the same course as earlier figures in these plays.

Meanwhile it must not be overlooked that there is one thing new in this development: it goes a stage further than in any former work by Ibsen. Like Falk, Brand, Nora and others, Stockmann ends in isolation; but his isolation is not identical with a flight from human intercourse. For a moment, indeed, even Stockmann thinks of flight. "If only I knew where a primæval forest or a small South Sea island was to be bought cheap," he says; and though this wish cannot be fulfilled, he still wishes to be gone far from this "madding crowd." "We will live no longer amid such meanness. Pack up as quickly as you can, Katrine; the sooner we are

off the better." But on maturer consideration he gives up this plan; he stays at his post to recruit supporters for his ideas, and then begins the battle again.

"Here is the battlefield; here the fight must be fought; here I will win the victory! Shall I be driven off the field by public opinion, by a 'compact majority,' and such devilries? No, thank you. What I want is so clear and plain. I only want to make it intelligible to still undeveloped brains that the liberals are the worst foes of every free man—that party-programmes choke off all young and hopeful truths—that everlasting consideration for other people's opinions sits on the head of morality and justice so that at last life here will be horrible."

In these words lies the kernel of the task which Ibsen set himself immediately on the general reprobation of "Ghosts" by the immense majority in Scandinavian countries. It was a vigorous and decided answer to the attack on him: Ibsen was not the man to be so easily scared.

But after this first blaze of wrath, expressed in "An Enemy of the People," a sort of discouragement seemed to have settled on the poet. Of what use, after all, was his determined attitude? Were men in general capable of taking up such ideal views of life as he had worked out in his dramas? Did they, on the whole, live under conditions which allowed of a life of truth and freedom? Were not the individuals to whom the conditions of life were thus

favourable mere exceptions, and was not falsehood quite as indispensable to the average human being as air and food are to all? It had been said, long before, of *Brand*, that "his morality, if it were carried out, would sacrifice half mankind to starvation for love of the ideal." Was not this in fact true? And might it not be said with equal truth of all Ibsen's views of life? Was it not senseless to go about with an uncompromising schedule of ideal demands in his coat-tail pocket, particularly when it was displayed only in the hovels of the poor? There were, as has been said, moments when Ibsen was in this mind; when he would ask himself these questions, and when he was even ready to answer them in the affirmative.

So he took up his ideal Titan once more, contemplated him from another side, placed him in a fresh environment, and set him face to face with a contrast as a compensating force.

The piece in which he worked this out is sadder and more pessimistic than anything else he has written. Brandes and many later critics have pointed out, and with justice, that behind Ibsen's pessimistic views of mankind there is a firm optimist belief in their capacity for improvement. However, when he wrote *Vildanden* (The Wild-Duck) this belief seems for the time to have deserted him.

Gregers Werle has none of Brand's power or Stockmann's combativeness; he is a poor, unhappy

dreamer, who is everywhere in the way, and who seems really to have no function in life but that of the luckless "thirteenth at table." His thoughts are of all that is best in man, and he has an honest desire to help where help is needed; but wherever he makes the attempt mishap ensues, because he is so bewildered by idealism and optimism that he always misapprehends both the means and the end. He wishes to help the friend of his youth out of the mire in which he has sunk, and fancies that everything is settled as soon as he brings the truth to light; but he only succeeds in giving his friend the opportunity of displaying his poverty of spirit in all its extent. He persuades Hedvig to sacrifice herself in order to win back her father's love; but he thus leads her to suicide, thereby giving Hjalmar Ekdal another sensational article for his magazine. Finally he throws everything over, and quits the scene to put himself out of the world; since, if life is really what it is beginning to appear to him, it is no longer worth living.

And in sharp contrast to this ill-starred Don Quixote, we have Dr. Relling, with his theory of life as a lie, and the practice he founds on it. The world is a wretched place, men are but bunglers; what the devil is the use of trying to haul them out of the mess? Lies are their element; without them they would be about as happy as a frog under an air-pump. "Deprive the average man of the lies of life, and you deprive

him of happiness." "It is the motive power; it is the seton which the physician applies to his patient's neck." Taking this view, Relling labours to counteract Gregers' endeavours—that is to say, he does all he can to preserve the existence of the lie among men; and for those who cannot devise a satisfactory lie of life, he invents one. Thus he contrives that Molvik should imagine himself to be "possessed," because otherwise the poor, kind-hearted sot would long since have died of self-contempt and despair; and he puts into Hjalmar Ekdal's head the monstrous fictions he has always on his lips. Both he and Gregers Werle aim at the same end, namely, at making folks happy and contented; but as to the means, they are diametrically opposed, and thus they hate and abuse each other as two sworn foes might do. To Relling, Gregers is neither more nor less than a fool, suffering from a fever of conscientiousness; and to Gregers, Relling is simply a cynic. Still, Ibsen attributes some good qualities to this pessimist prophet of the untruth; a good heart beats under his efforts in its service; and when Hjalmar Ekdal comes to judgment Ibsen is undoubtedly on Relling's side as against Gregers Werle.

Of all the blunderers depicted by Ibsen, Hjalmar Ekdal has the honour of pre-eminent badness. Peer Gynt is a man of honour and Stensgaard an honest soul in comparison with this contemptible creature, with his mouth always full of oil, bread

and butter, and fine phrases, smacking his lips with as much enjoyment of the words as of the food. There is nothing on earth which does not afford him occasion for speechifying; he is not moved by events, but easily becomes emotional when he hears himself talking about them, and then he goes about greatly edified by his own pathos. The figure is powerfully drawn, with a few broad touches; sometimes the colour is laid on so strongly that the picture has rather too great a resemblance to a caricature; but we cannot laugh with a clear conscience; such abjectness is too gross to raise an honest laugh; it rouses only disgust and aversion. If all ordinary men were of so base a stamp Relling would be altogether in the right, and Gregers altogether in the wrong; but then Ibsen's whole warfare against duplicity and falsehood would be in vain, for the spirit of truth and freedom, the real pillars of society, would find no home among men for ever.

However, the desperate mood which gave birth to *Vildanden* was of no long duration. It has disappeared from Ibsen's later works, and his ideal of life is seen once more under a nobler and more pleasing aspect than ever.

*Rosmersholm* is closely connected with Ibsen's last stay in Norway, in the summer of 1885. Since his former visit to his native land the great political struggle had been fought out, and had left behind it a fanaticism and bitterness which quite amazed



him. He was struck by the intolerant tone which prevailed ; he was painfully impressed by the virulent and vulgar way in which persons were assailed instead of causes being fought for ; and it saddened him to see the feuds to which the contest had given rise. Men who had formerly been the best friends were now the bitterest foes, although they had done each other no personal injury, but had merely taken up different views in life. The impression made on him was, on the whole—as he said in a conversation at the time—that Norway was inhabited no longer by two million men but by two million cats and dogs.

This feeling found utterance in the picture of party-warfare in *Rosmersholm*. The bitterness of the losing party is admirably represented by Rector Kroll ; and the cowardly fear, on the part of the winners, of speaking out plainly, is no less characteristically embodied in Mortensgaard, the freethinker and expediency-monger in politics, who considers it indispensable to recruit Christian allies. “ Peder Mortensgaard is the leader and chief of the future,” says Brendel ; “ I have never stood face to face with a greater. Peder Mortensgaard has in him a natural turn for omnipotence. He does everything he wishes because he never wishes to do more than he can. Peder Mortensgaard is capable of living without an ideal ; and that, you see, is the great secret of action and success. It is the sum total of worldly wisdom.”

And Rosmer, speaking of the struggle generally, says : "Men grow wicked in the strife which is now going on. Peace, and gladness, and reconciliation must be brought home to men's minds." Men must be ennobled—that is to say, their minds must be set free and their wills purified. And though Rosmer himself is not the man to solve the problem, still it stands forth as a goal to which the drama points. It is not merely the cause of truth and freedom for which Ibsen is here fighting ; it is the cause also of endurance and humanity.

But deeper than the antagonism of parties is the contrast represented in Rosmer and Rebecca.

Rebecca is at first recklessness personified. "I believe I could have carried through anything, whatever it were—at that time. For I then had my intrepid, free-born will," she says in the fourth act. "I did not know what caution meant. There was no situation which could daunt me." In this respect she was the direct opposite of Peer Gynt, since for her there was no interval between thought and action, between desire and effort ; she had courage to decide and audacity to act, and had thus acquired immense power over those among whom she lived, men and women whose views of life had made them vacillating and timid. They are failures, feeble individualities ; she on the contrary is, in her way, developed and complete ; this is the secret of her superiority. And besides this "free-born will" which circumstances had

never fettered, she had an independent view of life. Her action is never hindered by prejudice, and her clear strong spirit has made it a necessity to her "to live in the new time that was dawning; to share in all the new ideas." She wants to contribute to the triumph of these new ideas, and as she has heard that Ulrik Brendel had had a great influence over Pastor Rosmer as a boy, she determines to obtain a similar influence over him and win him to these views.

But then purely personal interests get mixed up with her schemes. She has come from Finmark, and here, in the South, a vast world seems to have opened before her. She has lived in humble and depressing circumstances; then an irresistible craving for happiness had come upon her; she had torn off the net that enclosed her, quite convinced that she should succeed in achieving happiness in one way or another. But hardly is she settled there when she falls madly in love with Pastor Rosmer with "a wild uncontrollable desire to be his." "It came upon me like a storm over the sea; it was like one of those hurricanes we have sometimes in the winter, up in the North. It seizes you, and drags you away as far as it will. No thought of resistance." And for this passion she stakes all. What right has Rosmer's ailing brain-sick wife to stand in the way of his freedom and her love? Beate makes his life gloomy and wretched; never till she is no more can there be

any hope for him of a life in liberty, happiness, and peace. So she drives Beate, step by step, to suicide in the mill-race.

When the piece begins, a year has elapsed since this catastrophe. A most tender, pure, and poetical relationship has grown up between Rosmer and Rebecca, a relationship based on love, though it has never been named between them, in which the spiritual trustfulness of a perfect marriage exists without its external confidential conditions; a relationship full of devotion and fervency, but free from all the violence of passion, in which their thoughts but not their bodies meet and embrace, and in which the intimate "thou" of daily speech is the only outward sign on either side of their mutual love.

From the first moment when Rebecca had entered his house Rosmer had felt himself attracted to her. He listened to all she said, imbibed her ideas, and read her books. He has no independence of nature, and is very open to influence, so her superiority is constantly more and more evident as they discuss the questions of general importance which arise in conversation; and he, by degrees, allows himself to be drawn away from the views of life he had formerly respected, till at last he shares her opinions on every point. In this respect it is she who gives and he who receives.

But in another respect the situation is reversed. His lofty and noble way of thinking, his purely

human impulses, and his lovable nature are irresistible in their effects, and ennobles hers. Her strong will is checked and broken by living with him, and her "hideous sensual passion, all those tempestuous powers have sunk to rest, and fall asleep." "A peace of mind" comes over her, "repose as that of a bird-rock<sup>1</sup> under the midnight sun up with us." She sees that her feeling was not love, and so real love finds its way into her soul—that love which desires nothing for itself, but is ready to sacrifice everything for its object, "that great unselfish love which is content with living together as we have lived." Then, when she has at last gained her end, when he entreats her to take the dead woman's place and be his wife, she dares not, for she now suddenly sees that the thing she has done must stand between them for ever. Love has given her courage for confession and strength for self-sacrifice, so she saves his lost sense of innocence, and his faith in her love and in his own power to elevate men, by telling him all and sacrificing her life.

But behind their individual fate two distinct principles of life may be discerned, in which Rosmer and Rebecca are respectively entangled. Rosmer is the outcome of the old worn-out type of culture which coerced a man's will and his views of life. His views may indeed be set free, but his

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to one of the islets, white with sea-birds, which form so prominent a feature of the coast of Finmark.

will is and must remain unavailing. Rebecca is the outcome of young unfettered nature ; her views are broad and her will firm, but it is not purified until too late. Hence both these representatives of imperfect leading come to destruction ; but over their bodies the drama holds on high Ibsen's lofty and splendid dream for the future, of man with freedom of impulse and a purified will. That is redeemed mankind as Ibsen has dreamed of it ; mankind made happy, and living in freedom, innocence, and joy. This is the "third Empire," of which Maximos the Mystic, and the Emperor Julian dreamed too, and which Ibsen never ceases to believe in. And devoted love is designated as the way to this consummation, in contrast with self-love. *Rosmersholm* was written to glorify it ; its elevating and edifying power constitutes the *credo* of the piece. It is indeed Ibsen's own confession of faith. While he lashes meanness and falsehood in the name of freedom and truth, self-sacrificing love is always his watchword when he rides forth to do battle with selfishness.

Ibsen paid a visit to Norway in the summer of 1886, and this was intimately connected with the composition of another play. The poet gave but a short time to the capital, but stayed for some weeks at the little town of Molde on the west coast of Norway, one of the chief halting-places in the route of European tourists on their way from Stavanger to the North Cape, and therefore visited every summer



by innumerable strangers. The impression made on him by the great tide of travellers was, perhaps, one of the strongest of those which in that year led Ibsen to feel the magnitude of the new conditions which had grown up during the twelve years of his absence from his native land. From this to some extent he derived the background of his new drama.

But the sea itself, on which the town stands, made a far deeper impression on his temperament. He would stand for hours on the landing-pier, gazing down into the depths or up at the distance. And when, in the following year, he was selecting a retreat for the summer months, he went to Jutland, instead of to the Tyrol as usual, and again it was the sea which enchanted and absorbed him as he wandered alone on the sandy shore.

The moods resulting from these walks form the fundamental key of the "Lady from the Sea,"<sup>1</sup> of which Mr. Gosse gives the following account:—

"Ibsen's Christmas gift to his admirers, his new drama of 'The Lady from the Sea,' is but a few days old as I write these pages, and my impression of it is still too fresh to be quite fixed. Perhaps the charm of novelty has biassed me, but I think not; I fancy this new work will be admitted to

<sup>1</sup> The original edition of Mr. Jaeger's book was published in the early part of 1888, and therefore contains no account of Ibsen's latest production, the five-act prose drama *Fruen fra Havet* (The Lady from the Sea). The above description of it is quoted, with the author's permission, from the new edition of Mr. Edmund Gosse's *Northern Studies* (pp. 101-103).

be one of the brightest jewels in the poet's crown. He has never been more daring in his analysis of character, never more brilliant in his evolution of it than here; and there is thrown over the whole play a glamour of romance, of mystery, of landscape beauty, which has not appeared in Ibsen's work to anything like the same extent since *Peer Gynt*. And, moreover, after so many tragedies, this is a comedy. The title can scarcely be translated, because a *havfrue* is a mermaid, a 'sea-lady,' and there is an under-meaning in this. It is the old story of the mortal who 'left lonely for ever the kings of the sea.'

"In a little coast-town of Norway—the district physician, Dr. Wangel, being left a widower with two daughters, thinks he will marry again. But at the mouth of the fjord, in a lighthouse on a desolate skerry, an exquisite girl lives with her father, the keeper. Wangel makes her acquaintance, falls in love with her, and persuades her to marry him. He frankly tells her of his own previous happy marriage, and she confesses it is not the first time she has been wooed. But the alliance is a fortunate one, until she loses her firstborn and only child. From that time she becomes gloomy, wayward, and morbid, and though she loves her husband she seems divided from him. She is still to all the town 'the lady from the sea,' the sea-wife. She pines for the roaring tides, for the splendour and resonance of the un-

conquerable ocean, and nothing takes the place of the full salt breeze she has abandoned. She bathes every day in the harbour, but she disdains these tame and spiritless waters of the fjord, and declares that they do her no good. She has lived the very life of the sea; her blood has tides in it, is subject to ebb and flow. She has been transplanted too late from her ocean-rock; she pines like a sea-weed in a tank or a petrel in a cage.

“But there is more than this to afflict her spirit. The old alliance she hinted at was a betrothal to a nameless man, a Finn, nursed, perhaps, by some storm-gathering witch, mate of a ship, who has exercised an absorbing influence over her. He is a creature of the sea, a sort of impersonation of the waves. She confesses all this to her husband, and tells him that she one day received a letter from this man, summoning her to a rendezvous on a desolate promontory. When she got there he told her that he had murdered his captain (a godly slaughter, by his own account), and was now flying from justice. He took a ring from her, tied it to one of his own, and flung it out to sea. The result of this enforced betrothal, to which her own will was never a partner, is that she feels ever more and more the sea, embodied in this wild, seafaring Finn, coming between her and her husband. At last, in the play, the Finn returns to claim her, and it is not until her husband leaves her perfectly free to choose between the two men,

and liberates her individual responsibility, that the morbid charm is broken, and she rapturously selects to remain with her husband, while the merman goes desperately down into his waters. It is impossible here to give the smallest idea of the imagination, subtlety, and wit concentrated in carrying out this curious story. 'The Lady from the Sea' is connected with the previous plays by its emphatic defence of individuality and its statement of the imperative necessity of developing it; but the tone is quite unusually sunny, and without a tinge of pessimism. It is in some respects the reverse of *Rosmersholm*; the bitterness of restrained and baulked individuality, which ends in death, being contrasted with the sweetness of emancipated and gratified individuality, which leads to health and peace."

Truth, liberty, and love are the corner-stones of the grand and solemn fabric which Ibsen has constructed in the course of years. If we study it as a whole we are surprised to see how thorough the work is. As an intellect Ibsen has developed with a logical precision which is unique perhaps among writers. The distance between his starting-point and his present standing-ground is, indeed, unusually great, and the intermediate stages are many; hence it is a matter of course that in process of time he has given up much which he once believed in. But a traveller, as he makes his way onwards, loses, as each new view opens on him,

some portion of the landscape he is leaving behind him ; and the chief thing is that the fresh point of view should be higher than the last—the outlook grow freer from work to work. The law of Ibsen's intellectual evolution has not been merely progress, it has also been an unbroken climb upwards.

This is equally true of Ibsen's career as a writer. His historical dramas are superior in technical merit to his romantic dramas, and his dramas of modern life as much superior to the historical plays.

A whole treatise might be written on the form of Ibsen's modern plays, and such a volume will some day undoubtedly be written ; for Ibsen fills as distinctive a place among the authors of the day in technical matters as in intellectual quality. His dramatic work is "epoch-making" in the history of the stage, and must certainly exercise a marked influence on the drama of the future. There is no other living writer in Europe of whom so much can be said.

In this century the drama has not in fact kept pace with literary development in other directions. It has lagged behind the novel, which fills so prominent a position that it might almost be regarded as the special art-manifestation of the day. And it owes this pre-eminence to the fact that the demand of our time is for probability and naturalism. This demand the stage cannot satisfy.

While all that is conventional is banished from the novel, it still must rule in the drama. In Augier, in Alexandre Dumas *filz*, in Sardou, in short, in all the foremost dramatists of our time, we find so much that is conventional that a naturalistic critic like Zola could with reason pronounce a severe sentence of condemnation on them; and even in Zola's own dramatic efforts, in *Thérèse Raquin*, for instance, conventionalism plays so important a part that it would be hard to recognise in its author the leader of the naturalistic school.

But the conventional has vanished from Ibsen's plays; he has succeeded in constructing a new dramatic formula answering to the naturalistic element in novel-writing. Its peculiarity is that it does not begin quite where ordinary plays begin; it has its beginning where ordinary plays usually end. All Ibsen's later works are in fact amplified catastrophes. The situation is complete before the drama opens; all the converging factors are in the part; the piece deals only with the immediate state of things; it has but to explain the situation and work up to the ultimate results. If an ordinary dramatist had written "A Doll's House," Nora's forgery would have formed the crisis of the piece, and the issues would have been revealed in the last act. Ibsen, on the contrary, takes these issues for his leading theme; the deed has been done before the curtain rises. Again, an ordinary dramatist would not have omitted Rebecca West's



plots against Beate Rosmer from his play ; on the contrary, he would have made use of them. Ibsen is content to show us their moral and practical results in every detail.

This analytical method of construction is allied to the old Greek tragedy as Sophocles composed it, and as Schiller tried to reproduce it in *Maria Stuart*. What is great and distinctive in Ibsen consists in this : that he has taken up the scheme of the analytical drama to work out a naturalistic picture in dramatic form. While the ordinary play can rarely give us more than a sketch from the psychological point of view, the analytical form allows of a highly-finished presentment of the soul, wherein men betray their most secret thoughts without having recourse to soliloquies, or any such improbable contrivance. This Ibsen perceived, and availed himself of the discovery ; and this is what gives his modern plays that unique and vivid stamp of actuality which distinguishes them.

At the same time the dialogue has gradually grown more and more natural. It is a great defect, from which most dramatic works suffer, that all the persons on the stage speak in a greater or less degree in the manner of the writer. In Ibsen, on the contrary, each speaker has his own manner ; and this is so consistently carried through that their peculiarities can be detected even in the smallest trifles. Any one who has once read "An Enemy of the People," "The Wild Duck," or

*Rosmersholm* (in the original), would recognise a speech of Doctor Stockmann's, of Gina Ekdal's, or Ulrik Brendel's, among a hundred.

As the originator of the analytical modern drama, Ibsen has now a high position in the literature of the nineteenth century throughout the world; and the great attention which his later works have attracted, not only in Germany, but in England and America, sufficiently proves that his importance is becoming recognised on both sides of the Atlantic. Since Holberg no Scandinavian writer has filled such a place in Germany as Ibsen now does; his work is actually marking a turning-point in German literature, for a whole crowd of young writers and critics have uplifted it as a banner round which they are rallying against the old school of German dramatic poetry.

But the multitude have not as yet fully recognised his importance, either in Germany or in the North—indeed, less in Norway than in Germany. The public do not feel easy face to face with this stern judge; his work has something uncanny in it, and his tremendous tragic sense terrifies them. His depth of thought makes too great demands on their intellectual energy, and he is therefore pronounced obscure and unintelligible. In fact, he is often entirely misunderstood; of this there have been many instances.

But he goes calmly on his way, without caring for the applause of the general public. "Neither

thanks nor threats affect the man who wholly wills the thing he wills." He has solved the problem of "being himself," and for that reason he is so grand a figure.

This absolute independence is recognisable even in the outer man. Ibsen is not a tall man, but he nevertheless gives an impression of importance. The torso is unusually powerfully built, and his head strikingly set on the shoulders. His face is completely framed in grey hair and beard, both far more abundant than is common with men of Ibsen's age (sixty-two in 1890). The firmly-set mouth, steady gaze through his spectacles, and bushy eyebrows, give the whole face a look of having just come to some determination; and above the other features rises so powerful a forehead that we are tempted to compare it to the idealised head of the Jupiter.

His whole frame suggests combativeness and strength. Once, when I heard him compare the Danish poet Grundtvig to a stunted but powerful Roman holm-oak, I thought to myself that this simile gave a no less striking image of his own exterior.

No one ever heard of Ibsen's being ill. Even the infirmities which age commonly brings with it have spared him so far. He looks the very picture of health. His enjoyment of his food is such that many a youth might envy him, and neither draughts nor storms, cold nor rain, seem to affect him.

His life—a quiet, happy family life—has been spent, since he quitted Norway, in Germany and

Italy, with his wife — Susannah Daae Ibsen, a daughter of Provost Thoresen of Bergen, a step-daughter of the novelist Magdalena Thoresen — and till within a few years with his son Sigurd Ibsen, now *attaché* to the Norwegian Minister at Washington, U.S.A.

He is to the last degree methodical in all he does. We should seek long and far before we found another man whose day's work is regulated to a minute like that of Henrik Ibsen. He rises at seven in summer, in winter a little later. He takes a very long time to dress, for he has acquired the habit of walking to and fro and thinking out his compositions while performing his toilet, which therefore occupies him above an hour and a half. He then takes a light breakfast, and as the clock strikes nine he sits down to work. He stops work at one, and takes a walk before his midday meal. In the afternoon he reads, takes a light supper, and goes early to bed. Thus the days are spent from year's end to year's end; even when travelling he tries to keep to his regular hours as far as possible.

With increasing years Ibsen's natural reserve has increased. In a *tête-à-tête* he can be communicative; but when more persons are present he finds it difficult to talk. He has that "coyness of spirit" of which the bard Jatgeir speaks in *Kongsemnerne*. He never is quite at ease save when he is at work.

His mode of work is characteristic and interesting. When he has decided on a subject, he thinks it over carefully for a long time without setting his pen to paper. A great deal of this thinking-work is done in the course of his long solitary walks.

When the scheme has been thought out in broad masses he writes a first sketch, and then the elaboration proceeds rapidly. At last the whole thing is written out ; but this, to Ibsen, is no more than a preliminary study. It is not till this is finished that he seems gradually to become familiar with his personages ; then does he first know their natures thoroughly, and how they express themselves. Then the whole is completely rewritten, and the third is a fair copy. He never sends out a piece of work till it is perfectly finished in a final copy. Summer is his best time for work ; the winter is principally spent in thinking out plots and plans ; these are worked out in the summer. Almost all his pieces have been written in the summer season ; of all the works he has published since leaving Norway only two have dragged on into the winter : "The Young Men's League," and "Emperor and Galilean."

When Ibsen begins to work out a play he takes no more food than is absolutely indispensable. A morsel of bread and a small cup of coffee are all he allows himself in the morning before sitting down to his desk. He fancies that if he took anything more it would hinder him in his work.

When the author of these notes went to see him once at Munich, he was amazed to see how small Ibsen's work-room was. He explained this by the fact that he never shuts himself in when at work ; he likes to walk about, in and out of three or four rooms. Thus he spends the four hours alternately walking and writing, while from time to time he takes a few whiffs at a very short pipe. He never smokes at any other time. In these working hours he prefers to be alone. The only person who can be with him without hindering him is his wife ; but even she generally leaves him to himself, for fear of disturbing him.

In these lonely and restless wanderings Henrik Ibsen has composed those profound and earnest masterpieces which have opened the eyes of the literary world, and shown that he is one of the most original and fully equipped intellects of our time.



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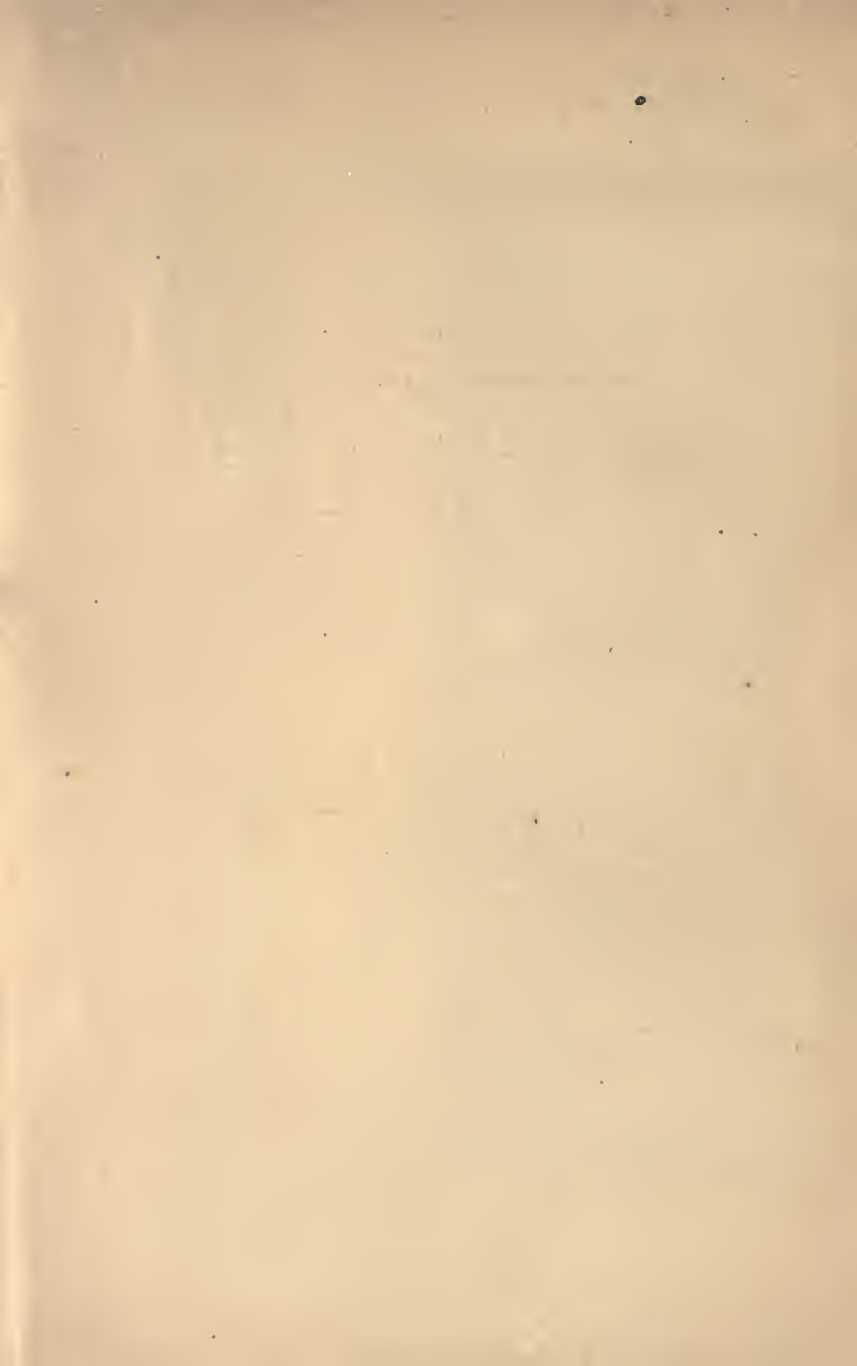
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